

# Open Research Online

---

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

## The theology of blessing in the Hebrew scriptures

### Thesis

How to cite:

Taylor, John B. (1992). The theology of blessing in the Hebrew scriptures. PhD thesis The Open University.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 1992 The Author

Version: Version of Record

---

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

---

[oro.open.ac.uk](http://oro.open.ac.uk)

DX 97604  
UNRESTRICTED

THE THEOLOGY OF BLESSING  
IN THE  
HEBREW SCRIPTURES

JOHN BRIAN TAYLOR  
B.A. [Dunelm], B.D. [Manchester],  
Dip. Ed. [Dunelm]

Authors number. M7021113  
Date of submission: 1<sup>st</sup> February 1992  
Date of award: 29<sup>th</sup> June 1992

Submitted for the degree of Ph.D  
The Faculty of Arts  
The Department of Religious Studies  
The Open University

1992

## Abstract

This work examines the root בָּרַךְ in the Hebrew Scriptures contextually, to determine the content of blessing and to ask what the concept of blessing has to say about the nature and the purposes of God. It is examined in the separable strands, in the Yahwist, the Deuteronomists, the Priestly writings, the Historical writers, the Psalms and the Wisdom Literature, and in the Prophets.

The main theological conclusions are that blessing is a way of talking about God immanent in everything he has made. It is his invitation to human beings to cooperate with him in his creative purposes for the world. It is best understood in terms of "gift", as well as being, in the Priestly writings, the potential for growth and development in every created thing. Blessing is a theological concept which values the material and the physical. It reveals the importance of categories of relationship, presence and community solidarity. God's promise of blessing to Abraham is for the sake of the whole human race. It is concerned with God's abundant provision for the maintenance of life, including his provision for the poor and needy who do not have immediate access to God's bounty. Whereas curse is about exclusion, blessing is about inclusion and identification.

The highest expression of a living relationship with God is in worship, in which human beings join with the whole created world to bless God, to praise and glorify him. Within the mutuality of the relationship to which God invites his creation, worship matters to God as well as to his children. Blessing is an eschatological concept which points to the **שְׁלוֹם** of the end-time. It has been devalued. The rich tones which it has in the Hebrew scriptures need to be restored to enrich our worship and to enhance our appreciation of the wonder of God's world.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	6
Part I Prolegomena	
Chapter 1	
Introduction	7
1.1 The Reason for Writing	7
1.2 Biblical scholarship and Systematic Theology	9
1.3 The need for a Theology of Blessing	10
Chapter 2	
Methodology	12
2.1 The Etymology of the word בָּרַךְ	12
A. The separable strands	12
B. The occurrence of the root בָּרַךְ in the Hebrew Scriptures	20
C. The relation of בָּרַךְ to אֲשֶׁרִי and associated concepts	21
D. The euphemistic use of בָּרַךְ	34
E. The use of בָּרַךְ in names	35
2.2 בָּרַךְ in translation	36
A. The Septuagint [LXX]	37
B. The Vulgate	43
C. English, French, German	44
2.3 Observations on Method	46
Part II Contextual Analysis	
Chapter 3	
The Theology of Blessing in the Yahwist	52
3.1 God blessing people	52
3.2 People blessing God	72
3.3 People blessing people	74
Chapter 4	
The Theology of Blessing in Deuteronomy	85
4.1 God blessing people	85
4.2 People blessing God	93
4.3 People blessing people	97



Chapter 5	
The Theology of Blessing in the Priestly Writers	110
5.1 God blessing people	110
5.2 People blessing God	129
5.3 People blessing people	130
Chapter 6	
The Theology of Blessing in the Historical Writers	135
6.1 God blessing people	135
6.2 People blessing God	142
6.3 People blessing people	159
Chapter 7	
The Theology of Blessing in the Psalms and the Wisdom Literature	167
7.1 God blessing people	167
7.2 People blessing God	181
7.3 People blessing people	192
Chapter 8	
The Theology of Blessing in the Prophets	202
8.1 God blessing people	202
8.2 People blessing God	218
8.3 People blessing people	222
Part III Findings	
Chapter 9	
The Significance of Blessing	227
9.1 Blessing in perspective	227
9.1.1 Blessing and בְּרָכָה	229
9.1.2 Blessing and שְׁלוֹם	231
9.1.3 Blessing, חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת and בְּרִית	234
9.2 The politics of writing	237
9.3 The development of the concept of blessing	243
9.4 The content of blessing	254
9.5 The function of blessing-talk	257
9.5.1 God's relationship with the created world	258
9.5.2 Blessing and worship	260
9.5.3 Positive relationships in human society	266

	5
9.6 The performance of blessing	269
9.6.1 The blessing of living things	270
9.6.2 The blessing of "inanimate" objects	289
9.7 Theology or theologies ?	294
 Part IV	
 Chapter 10	
Theological Pointers	300
 Bibliography	310
 Abbreviations	337
 Index of Scriptural References	340

## Acknowledgements

My grateful thanks are due to John Ferguson, formerly Dean and Director of Studies in Arts in the Open University and until his retirement President of the Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham. Without him this work would never have been begun. His untimely death robbed me of my external supervisor and of a friend.

To his successor Dr Rex Mason, formerly Senior Tutor at Regent's Park College, Oxford and Lecturer in Hebrew and Old Testament Studies at the University of Oxford, and to my internal supervisor, Dr Francis Clark, formerly Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the Pontifical University in Rome and Reader in the Department of Religious Studies of the Open University, I owe a great debt for their wise and firm guidance. Without their probing questions this work might never have been completed. None the less the inadequacies of this presentation remain mine, not theirs.

I am grateful to my colleagues of the Division of Ministries of the Methodist Church for allowing me a three month sabbatical to draw the threads of this work together and to the Sugden Bequest for a contribution towards the cost of producing it.

## Part I Prolegomena

### Chapter 1

#### Introduction

##### 1.1 The reason for writing

After wrestling over a number of years with the question as to whether children should be permitted to receive bread and wine at the Lord's Supper, the Methodist Church in Great Britain produced at the Methodist Conference held in Portsmouth in 1987 a report entitled "Children and Holy Communion".(1) The Faith and Order Committee of the Church had already produced outline reports in 1973 and 1975 laying out the theological issues.(2) In the 1987 report, guidelines were offered making official what had been happening unofficially in many churches up and down the country, namely that children should be allowed to receive bread and wine in carefully specified circumstances. The same debate was taking place in other Churches both in this country and overseas more or less at the same time.

Part of the pressure to allow children to participate fully in the Communion Service came from children themselves. For children simply to be present at the celebration was itself new in the late sixties and seventies. Even then they remained in their seats when their parents went forward to receive the elements. However, the next step happened quite naturally. Children began to accompany their parents to the communion rail and it was not long before children and their parents began to "ask why they cannot receive bread and wine" and

---

1. see the Methodist Conference Agenda 78-93

2. Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order 1933-1983

before some expressed "dissatisfaction at receiving *only a blessing* [my italics]".(3)

Since the Conference report left the ultimate decision as to whether children should or should not receive bread and wine to the decision of each local Church Council what happens varies considerably from place to place. However, alongside the practice of permitting children to receive the elements, there has also grown up the practice of both children and adults presenting themselves at the communion rail for a blessing. Enquiries of those participating in this way as to the meaning of receiving a blessing soon revealed that few had any understanding of what blessing is all about. Many simply felt that it was "a nice thing to do". Even many of those giving the blessing had no clear idea what they were doing, except to say that "it is a way of including people who might otherwise be left out". That in itself is not to be despised.

The desire to include people in an appropriate way is the clear intention of the only formal, but exceedingly brief, British Methodist statement on "Blessing Children at Holy Communion [1978]". It ends with the words: "It is important that an action that takes place at the climax of the most solemn service should be explained to both adults and children when opportunity allows, especially as this particular action can be understood in many different ways, some of them quite foreign to Methodist tradition and belief." There is a need for a study of blessing because of its intimate connection with day to day practice of ministry. Today Methodist ministers are often approached concerning the blessing of a new house or flat or recently acquired



car or eternity ring. They are asked to bless people about to take a trip in an aeroplane. Fifty years ago such practices would have been likely to attract the label "foreign to the Methodist tradition and belief". These and similar situations require some thought if they are not to be simply magical acts to give protection to the superstitious.

However, anyone resolving to undertake a study of blessing and doing some preliminary reading will discover that much of the available material on the subject is in German. A lot of it has never been translated into English. Much of it is not readily accessible to the general public. It also rapidly becomes clear that the subject is immense. Should anyone want to give a systematic account of blessing, it would not be possible to produce a comprehensive study embracing the sociology of blessing and the psychology of blessing, if the treatment were to be kept within reasonable compass! To try to do a study which traces the development of blessing in its many forms down the ages to the present day would be an enormous task and as for trying to take account of the concept of blessing in the world's major religions, that would be a life's work! What follows therefore is an attempt to examine the understanding of blessing [בְּרָכָה] found in the Hebrew scriptures. It is a much more modest project than a systematic theologian might wish but an undertaking which has the possibility of laying foundations for future work.

## 1.2 Biblical scholarship and Systematic Theology

None the less some of the basic questions of the systematician remain. What the Hebrew scriptures have to say about blessing is only one aspect of a total system of belief and even a cursory reading of the literature relating to it reveals that it is a multi-faceted topic, so

that questions need to be asked about its inner coherence. Do the various things said about blessing themselves fit together and make sense as a whole? An examination of the many contexts in which the root בָּרַךְ appears exposes the range of meaning to be encompassed in a search for coherence [Chapters 3-8]. Indeed, how do the various strands of teaching relate to each other? Is what the Yahwist teaches about blessing compatible with what the Deuteronomic writers have to say? Furthermore, because there is no definitive statement about blessing set in tablets of stone, some account must be taken of the development of the concept within the period spanned by the Hebrew scriptures, perhaps to find pointers towards the way in which it is developed subsequently in the christian era.

### 1.3 The need for a Theology of Blessing

To ask *theological* questions about anything, as compared with any other kind of questions about it, is to enquire about its relationship with God. What has God got to do with blessing and what has blessing got to do with God? However, it is not possible to pose such questions without some prior understanding of the nature of God, some notion of what he is like. Each person trying to do theology brings to the task the present state of his or her knowledge of God, together with a whole host of other presuppositions, some recognized, some partially owned and some of which he or she is totally unaware. Those who produced the Hebrew scriptures, each and all, had their preconceived ideas about the nature of God. What they write reveals what they think God is like.

However, as well as their assumptions about who God is, the biblical writers and editors of the various traditions within the scriptures

have at the same time other concerns which may be served by their theology. The Yahwist, for example, puts his understanding of what God is like and what blessing is concerned to achieve at the service of the monarchy. The kings are the inheritors of the promise to Abraham [Genesis 12.1-3,7a]. Other writers are concerned to demonstrate the importance of Jerusalem in the life of the nation or to legitimate the place of the priesthood in the cult. Does their understanding of God and his will for his people determine that these shall be their concerns? Or does the fact that these are their concerns influence their expression of what they believe to be the nature of God and his demands upon his people?

So, one way of testing the significance of what they write is to ask what picture of God it produces and what end this knowledge serves. This is the approach taken below. It raises complex hermeneutical issues concerning the criteria by which we today make any assessment of the significance of the biblical writings, for we too cannot come uncluttered to the task. Each of us brings his or her own *Vorverständnis* and "political" agenda to the task. Each of us risks being changed in dialogue with the text and the moment we try to make any evaluation of what we observe within the scriptures, questions may properly be asked concerning our criteria for making a judgement. None the less whether there is one single theology of blessing or several, whether or not they are all equally acceptable, an exploration of the root בֵּרַךְ is worth undertaking. It is after all important to learn what we can about the nature and purposes of the blessing God, revealed in the Hebrew scriptures, whom we are invited to worship.

יְהוָה שֵׁם יְהוָה מְבָרַךְ.

## Chapter 2

### Methodology

#### 2.1 The Etymology of the word בִּרְךְ.

##### A. The separable strands.

The dictionaries distinguish in the Hebrew Scriptures:

[a] בִּרְכָה translated as pool or reservoir.

[b] בִּרַךְ found in the Qal [Psalm 95.6 & 2 Chronicles 6.13] and the Hiphil [Genesis 24.11], together with בִּרְךָ [knee], meaning "to kneel".

[c] בִּרַךְ found in a range of tenses, although mainly in the Piel, meaning "to bless", as well as the noun form בִּרְכָה "blessing".(1)

Various attempts have been made to connect the three strands together. Scharbert shows how other Semitic languages reveal the same three strands belonging to this root. In fact, the breadth of testimony in Akkadian, Ugaritic, Phoenician-Punic, Aramaic and Old South Arabic is impressive, but he himself recognises that this wealth of evidence showing the three related strands of בִּרַךְ does not help

---

1. J. SCHARBERT TDOT Vol II article on בִּרַךְ.



to explain wherein the connection lies.(2) [cf.also the survey of the Near Eastern material in Plassmann and Wehmeier](3) Many attempts to isolate the primary meaning of the root do so by connecting two strands whilst neglecting the third.

The only [rather tentative] way in which בִּרְכָּה [pool] has been tied to the idea of blessing is by the recognition that water is a prerequisite for anything to live and flourish. Indeed one of the main ways of understanding blessing in the Hebrew Scriptures is in terms of fertility, the fertility of the land, the prosperity of the crops and the herds, as well as the production of a numerous progeny. For such tangible benefits water is beyond dispute a necessity.(4) The arguments, however, making this link between water and blessing, are not very convincing and hardly take account of the בִּרְכָּה [knee] strand, unless it be assumed that kneeling is the appropriate posture for drinking from a pool.

It is Thomas Plassmann, writing in 1913 (5) in a doctoral thesis which does not seem to have received much attention from German scholars, who gives an impressive list of predecessors in the field spanning the years 1621-1901, who all derive their concept of blessing from

---

2. SCHARBERT 281-284

3. T. PLASSMANN The Signification of B<sup>e</sup>rākā

G. WEHMEIER Der Segen im Alten Testament

4. A. MURTONEN VT 9 1959

He translates Psalm 84.6: "When crossing the valley of scant moisture they will make it a spring, and even blessings which early rains give."

He then writes: "This translation makes good sense, and the same idea is still more exactly defined in the former passage [Joshua 15.19], where the wells as such are called benediction. The word for pool, b<sup>e</sup>rekāh, may be recalled in this connection."

5. T. PLASSMANN The Signification of B<sup>e</sup>rākā 1-12



kneeling. His own thesis also takes בָּרַךְ as the prehistoric base-line from which all later shades of meaning and variations of meaning have come. Plassmann's study is a valuable survey of the many theories that were advanced up to the beginning of the twentieth century, as well as containing an interesting hypothesis of his own. He describes the development of the concept of blessing from the בָּרַךְ starting-point in terms of fertility and abundance of material things, its content becoming more abstract to include the idea of benediction [the powerful word] as well as the separate and distinct sense of "propitious gift".(6)

This view is still found in books being reprinted today where it is claimed that kneeling and blessing are related, based on the uncritical belief that kneeling is the appropriate position in which to receive liturgical blessing.(7) Joseph Thuruthumaly, however, after dismissing the connection between בָּרַךְ [blessing] and בִּרְכָה [pool], likewise seeks to dismiss the link with kneeling. "Here one supposes that either wishing and blessing are performed kneeling and hence the building up of the meaning "to do homage" or kneeling as the usual posture to receive blessing. But the meaning "to do homage", "to praise" is not found in all north Semitic language. And most probably this meaning evolved in the biblical Hebrew and then spread into other languages. Likewise there is hardly anything to show that blessing was received

---

6. See his diagram of the *Evolution of Meanings* at the end of his work 179

7. I. ELBOGEN Der jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung 4

Originally published in 1913 when the prevailing scholarly view made the link between kneeling and blessing, he wrote:

"ברכה kommt von ברך, das ursprünglich auf die Knie fallen heisst..."

kneeling."(8) He is undoubtedly right in his claim that these particular postures are later developments in relation to blessing.(9)

It is H. Mowvley [following Johannes Pedersen] (10) who explains the connection between the knee and blessing in other terms than kneeling, tying them together through the idea of fecundity.(11) The link is made through the birth of children. He writes: "The connection between these two ideas, seemingly unrelated in English, is to be found in the fact that children are born on the knees and this was considered to be a great blessing. Such a blessing could be passed on most naturally within the family unit."(12) Mowvley refers to Job 3.12 to support this view. "Why was I ever laid on my mother's knees or put to suck at her breasts?"[NEB] - the first things done after birth. With the backing of Gerhard von Rad [and others],(13) he finds further evidence for the link between  $\text{קָרַע}$  and  $\text{קָרַע}$  in the customary way in which children were adopted [cf. Genesis 48.9]. Bring them to me, I pray you, so that I may take them on my knees."[NEB] Footnote in NEB: or "may bless them". NEB is clearly following von Rad, who describes "placing upon the knees" as "a legal rite of adoption".(14) Morris Gross, following Pedersen even more vigorously than Mowvley, pursues this same line

8. J. THURUTHUMALY Blessing in Paul 14

9. The earliest uses of the concept of blessing do not seem to have had God as the object of blessing, presumably in the belief that a superior's position cannot in any way be enhanced or enriched by an inferior. Most commentators insist that the blessing of God grew up in a liturgical context. It is then that the conjecture concerning the link between kneeling and praising God becomes a proper consideration.

10. J. PEDERSEN Israel, its Life and Culture

11. H. MOWVLEY "The Concept and Content of 'Blessing' in the Old Testament"

12. MOWVLEY 75

13. G. von RAD Genesis

14. von RAD 410

of argument. "...the root בָּרַךְ for blessing is derived from בְּרִיָּה meaning the seat of reproductive power, the source of fertility and offspring."(15)

There can, however, be no doubt that the most widespread understanding of what blessing is about has for the last sixty years been strongly associated with the idea of the possession and the transmission of the life-force which causes the possessor and the recipient of blessing to prosper. The major works in this area are those produced by Johannes Pedersen,(16) Sigmund Mowinckel,(17) and Johannes Hempel.(18) Their work in the 1920's has been taken up, amended, discussed in every detail, in a large number of books and articles, to which reference will be made in the course of this essay. However, specific reference ought perhaps to be made here to a much-quoted work by Lyder Brun, who being contemporary with Pedersen, Mowinckel and Hempel built on their work in his discussion of the place of blessing in the New Testament and the early Church.(19)

For Pedersen, blessing is vitality, the life-force without which no one can live, but also more than that. It is that power which enables survival, plus the guarantee of the increase of the family/clan, the fertility of flocks and herds and abundant crops. Blessing is the assurance of the success, the thriving of every enterprise undertaken. Blessing is above all fruitfulness. It may flow from the

---

15. M. GROSS The Relation of Blessing and Cursing in the Psalms

16. J. PEDERSEN Israel, its Life and Culture

17. S. MOWINCKEL Psalmestudien V

Segen und Fluch in Israels Kult und Psalmendichtung

18. J. HEMPEL "Die israelitischen Anschauungen von Segen und Fluch im Lichte altorientalischer Parallelen"

19. L. BRUN Segen und Fluch im Urchristentum



בְּרָכָה of the father/head of the clan, or from the king, but its consequences are experienced in communal terms.(20) The one who is בְּרָכָה possesses בְּרָכָה and in the act of blessing can transmit that vital life-force to others.

The Norwegian scholar Sigmund Mowinckel explicitly acknowledges that his study is based on Pedersen. He too claims that blessing is the fundamental power which makes life possible, and writing twenty years after the Psalmestudier in his Offersang og Sangoffer could still write in terms that look like direct quotation from Pedersen. "Put briefly, blessing is identical with the very powers of life and their manifestations in external and internal happiness and welfare: in health, a long life, fertility, power of victory, of happiness, peace and joy and power and integrity of mind in fellowship with the clan, and in a life in conformity to 'justice' and 'law' and 'tradition'." "It is the mysterious 'potency' and power and strength, immanent in life itself..."(21) However, because ultimately in Mowinckel's understanding Yahweh is the source of all blessing "the transference of blessing was a holy, ritual act, revolving round the 'holy' power, and the Holy One; the deity was present somehow through the invocation and mention of his name. Obviously, then, the blessing 'from the very first' had its place in the cult itself. To procure, secure and increase "the blessing", that was the object of the temple services in Israel, put in a

---

20. J. SCHARBERT Solidarität in Segen und Fluch im Alten Testament und in seiner Umwelt

K. FAHLGREN S<sup>e</sup>dākā, nahestehende und entgegengesetzte Begriffe im Alten Testament

Both these works explore the notions of blessing and curse as community concepts. Fahlgren's dissertation includes many other related ideas, all of which are examined in a social context.

See also D. DAUBE Studies in Biblical Law

21. S. MOWINCKEL The Psalms in Israel's Worship II 44

nutshell."(22) It is precisely this marrying of blessing to the liturgical context which has been the source of much scholarly criticism of Mowinckel's thesis. And even though in his early writings he makes it clear that his understanding of what constitutes "cult" is large, his insistence on the formal connection is stated rather than proven, for his work does not adequately trace the development of the theology of blessing in order to support his point of view.(23) This criticism is worked through by Claus Westermann.(24) "Mowinckel is more interested in the phenomenological meaning of blessing than in the history of how the concept developed. As a result, the essential thing for Mowinckel from the beginning of Israel's history to its end is the cultic impartation of blessing as the power of life."(25).

It is in his description of the content of blessing in terms of **שְׁלוֹם** that Mowinckel strongly resembles the work of Johannes Hempel. "To have 'blessing' includes whatever the Israelite understood by the term *šālôm*, 'wholeness', 'harmony', or 'peace', as it is usually translated."(26) The first part of Hempel's treatise on blessing and curse (27) is concerned to trace the origin of both to the area of

---

22. S. MOWINCKEL The Psalms in Israel's Worship II 46

23. MOWINCKEL Psalmenstudien V 13

"Wie an anderem Orte gezeigt, gehört es zu den Grundüberzeugungen des primitiven Menschen, dass nichts an sich ewig dauernde Wirkungen hat. Auch die grösste und nachhaltigste Kräfteinflössung muss von Zeit zu Zeit wiederholt werden." "Das Mittel, das das alte Israel zu wiederholter Verbindung mit der Gottheit zwecks Erlangung des göttlichen Segens hat, ist der Kult."

24. WESTERMANN Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church 23

25. WESTERMANN 23

26. MOWINCKEL Psalms in Israel's Worship II 44

27. HEMPEL 30

The opening words of the work refer to the idea that HEMPEL discovered in RUDOLF KITTEL'S article "Segen und Fluch" in RPTbK 18 "Ohne von einander zu wissen, haben SIGM. MOWINCKEL und ich seit



magic. However, in describing the content of blessing Hempel agrees with Pedersen that blessing is the source of material prosperity, but with Mowinckel he picks out the word **שְׁלוֹם** as the most comprehensive description of it. The peace which flows from being blessed is a state of freedom from injury and danger, of quiet security, of good fortune and wholeness in the widest sense of the word.(28)

Another of approach to the meaning of **בְּרָכָה** in the Old Testament is worthy of serious mention. It is that taken by K.Hj. Fahlgren in his inaugural dissertation.(29) This is a valuable, extensive study of Old Testament concepts which he believes are best understood in community terms. It is a work worthy of closer study, for, largely neglected or overlooked in the discussion of blessing, it contains many interesting and stimulating ideas which are developed in other places apparently without knowledge of or reference to Fahlgren. For example, in tracing the development of the concept of blessing he makes a connection with the idea of "promise" which only emerges again thirty years later.(30) The making of this connection is a development

---

Jahren an dem gleichen Thema gearbeitet und sind zu teilweise gleichen Ergebnissen gekommen, zu der Erkenntnis nämlich, dass unter den Anschauungen des ATs von Segen und Fluch uns Vorstellungen begegnen, die trotz aller Sublimierungen immer noch ihre Herkunft aus primitiv-magischen Gebräuchen verraten." 148-154

28. HEMPEL 58 & 59

"Sucht man nach einem zusammenfassenden Ausdruck, der alles in sich schliesst, was der alte Orientale als Inhalt des Segens für sich, für die ihm Nahestehenden und für sein Volk begehrt, so kann man kein anderes Wort finden als das eine: *šālōm*." "Es ist der Zustand des Unversehrt- und Ungefährdetseins, der Ruhe und Sicherheit, des Glückes und des Heiles im weitesten Umfang."

29. FAHLGREN S<sup>e</sup>dākā, nahestehende und entgegengesetzte Begriffe im Alten Testament

30. J. HOFTIJZER Die Verheissungen an die drei Erzväter  
C. WESTERMANN The Promise to the Fathers

from the root concept underlying his understanding of blessing, which is that blessing is first and foremost "gift". This is its basic meaning.(31) In this belief he is able to translate ׀׀׀ as "to give". This line of enquiry is worth examination in discussion of Paul's use of the word εὐλογίᾱ with the specific sense of gift in speaking of the Collection for the needs of Jerusalem [cf. 2 Corinthians 9.5].

The most influential names in the debate about blessing in the last twenty years have indisputably been those of Claus Westermann, Josef Scharbert, Gerhard Wehmeier and more recently Christopher Wright Mitchell [see the Bibliography for lists of their work]. Their contributions impinge on the discussion of blessing at so many points that it will be necessary to make constant reference to their writings in what follows.

B. The occurrence of the root ׀׀׀ in the Hebrew Scriptures. (32)

	<u>gal</u>	<u>ni</u>	<u>pi</u>	<u>pu</u>	<u>hi</u>	<u>hith</u>	<u>brkh</u>	<u>berek</u>	
Genesis	8	3	60		1	2	16	3	93
Exodus	1		5				1		7
Leviticus			2				1		3
Numbers	2		14	1					17
Deuteronomy	9		28	1		1	12	1	52
Joshua			7				2		9

---

31. FAHLGREN 162-163  
"Das einzig Sichere ist somit, dass b<sup>e</sup>rākā in allen diesen aus den ältesten alttestamentlichen Quellen stammenden Beispielen Gabe schlechthin bedeutet. Es kann wohl kaum ein Zweifel darüber herrschen, dass wir in dieser konkreten, mit dem profanen Leben im alten Israel zusammenhängenden Bedeutung auch die Grundbedeutung von b<sup>e</sup>rākā vor uns haben."

32. All the books of the Old Testament are listed in the traditional Protestant order in the belief that it may be significant to know where ׀׀׀ does not appear, as well as where it occurs frequently.

Judges	1		3	2			1	3	10
Ruth	4		1						5
1 Samuel	7		4				2		13
2 Samuel	3		10	1			1		15
1 Kings	6		6					3	15
2 Kings			3				2	2	7
1 Chronicles	2		13	1					16
2 Chronicles	4		5				2	1	12
Ezra	1							1	2
Nehemiah			4				2		6
Esther									
Job			7	1			1	2	11
Psalms	18		52	4		1	9	1	85
Proverbs	1		3	2			8		14
Ecclesiastes									
Song of Songs									
Isaiah	2		4			2	4	3	15
Jeremiah	2		1			1			4
Lamentations									
Ezekiel	1						3	3	7
Daniel									
Hosea									
Joel							1		1
Amos									
Obadiah									
Jonah									
Micah									
Nahum								1	1
Habakkuk									
Zephaniah									
Haggai			1						1
Zechariah	1						1		2
<u>Malachi</u>							<u>2</u>		<u>2</u>
	<u>73</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>233</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>71</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>425</u>

C. The relation of בָּרַךְ to אֲשֶׁרִי and associated concepts.

[a] אֲשֶׁרִי its grammatical form:

אֲשֶׁרִי [‘ashrê] is usually identified with the word אֲשֶׁר [osher], meaning ‘happiness’. It is masculine plural construct in form and means literally ‘happinesses of...’

[b] The occurrence of the word אֲשַׁרִּי.

Genesis	1		
Deuteronomy	1		
1 Kings	1		
2 Chronicles	1		
Job	1		
Psalms	25		
Proverbs	8		
Ecclesiastes	1		
Isaiah	3		
Daniel	1	<u>Total</u>	43

אֲשַׁר [ashar]

Genesis	1		
Job	1		
Psalms	2		
Proverbs	5		
Song of Songs	1		
Isaiah	4		
Malachi	2	<u>Total</u>	16*

\* 7 references are included which have the root-meaning "to go straight"/"to advance".

The total occurrence of the root אֲשַׁר ... 59



All 43 noun forms are translated in the Septuagint by μακάριος. The verb forms are translated μακαρίζω in all cases where the concept of blessing/happiness is involved, with the exception of:-

[a] Proverbs 3.18 where the Pual participle מְאַשְׁרֵם is translated by ἀσφαλής meaning "safe"/"secure", and

[b] Proverbs 31.28 where the Piel future וַיַּאֲשֶׁרְהָּ is translated καὶ ἐπλούτησαν from πλουτίζω meaning "to make rich".

Whereas in Greek μακάριος may be used of both human beings and gods, in Hebrew אֲשֶׁרִי is never used with reference to God. The word אֲשֶׁר [osher] itself appears only once in the Old Testament in Genesis 30.13 [בְּאַשְׁרֵי 'happy am I' AV & RSV]. The 43 occurrences of the word אֲשֶׁרִי represent only one tenth of the number of times בָּרוּךְ appears and a large part of the 43 references are in the Wisdom literature.

[c] its relation to בָּרוּךְ:

Walter Käser, after a careful examination of the various contexts in which אֲשֶׁרִי and בָּרוּךְ are used, comes to the conclusion that they are different in literary form and usage and that they do not in fact belong together. אֲשֶׁרִי appears predominantly in the Wisdom literature and is the counterpart of the cultic בָּרוּךְ. (33) E. Lipiński too insists that the Old Testament beatitudes introduced by the word אֲשֶׁרִי are a special literary form, which is normally to be distinguished from the

---

33. W. KÄSER "Beobachtungen zum alttestamentlichen Makarismus" ZAW 82 1970 225-250

"Es (= אֲשֶׁרִי) kommt ausschliesslich in ihr (=Weisheitsliteratur) vor und bildet das Gegenstück zum kultischen בָּרוּךְ."



idea of blessing.(34) In this he finds support from Käser who isolates four elements in the stylisation of the form, namely:-

[a] the second element prolongs the first [cf.

Ecclesiastes 10.17],

[b] a parallelism with the same meaning [cf.

Proverbs 3.13],

[c] antithetical parallelism [rarer] [cf. Proverbs 14.21; 29.18], and

[d] climactic parallelism [cf. Isaiah 56.2a].

Käser concludes that the Old Testament beatitudes are similar in shape to familiar forms of Hebrew poetry but that they contain a distinct eschatological reorientation of what is expected from Yahweh, and in this they are forerunners of the New Testament beatitudes.(35)

Lipiński further distinguishes between אֲשַׁרִּי and בְּרָכָה in relation to what is achieved by their utterance. "The expression of woe is in fact a wishing of misfortune whereas the curse is an efficacious, destructive word which actually brings about the content of the threat. Similarly, blessing is a creative, realising, efficacious word which brings about the very thing that it expresses and signifies. The beatitude is on the other hand a form of congratulation and it presupposes the existence of happiness already achieved or at least in the process of being achieved."(36) He goes on to look at the Psalms

---

34. E. LIPINSKI "Macarismes et Psaumes de Congratulation"

RB 75 1968 321-367

35. W. KÄSER op.cit.

36. There is a real problem in describing the subtleties of the debate concerning the exact meaning of curse. There is often confusion because of the inexact use of words, making it difficult to convey slight nuances and shades of meaning. The problems of translating from one language to another compound the problem. For example, because of the inadequacy of the word "imprecation" in English to

in the light of his belief that the beatitudes are expressions of congratulation leading on to thanksgiving for something already past, accomplished, completed. It is especially to the worship of the Temple that he looks for confirmation of this view. He finds many examples of ritual formulas of congratulation in the Psalms used by the priest to welcome pilgrims to the Temple. [cf. Psalms 1,32,41,65 & others] Some have come to give thanks for health recovered [Psalms 32 & 41] or in fulfilment of an oath [Psalm 112]. Some have come in gratitude for the birth of a child [Psalm 127]. And Lipiński makes an impressive case for his conclusion that the beatitudes in the Psalms are older than the beatitudes in the Wisdom literature.(37) That they are cultic in origin finds universal support. Henri Cazelles, for example, writes: "'ashrê is a liturgical cry, and its late connection with the verb 'šr [to run] points to an act in which believers seek happiness; it was probably the pilgrimage to the temple in the sense of the Deuteronomistic movement and the return from the exile. This act makes the believers 'happy'..."(38)

In drawing the parallel between the structure of cursing and the structure of blessing, however, Lipiński is not entirely consistent. Both curse and blessing are efficacious words which achieve what they express. Expressions of woe [אֵי and אֵי, in Greek οὐχί] are a wishing of misfortune on someone which are not immediately effectual. They may be conditional. They may leave room for a change of heart.

---

indicate the shade of meaning required in Lipiński's argument the French word "imprécation" has been rendered "expression of woe"

LIPINSKI 321

For a full analysis of the language of curse, see

H.C. BRICHTO The Problem of 'Curse' in the Hebrew Bible

37. LIPINSKI 353

38. TDOT 1 article 'ashrê

They are optative in mood and future [if they ever become a reality]. Expressions of happiness [אַשְׁרֵי] are more concerned with something already granted and are in a sense only complete when thanksgiving is offered in the Temple. The parallelism implicit in Lipiński's argument is extremely uneasy at this point. The situation is probably best resolved [following the argument of Janzen](39) by questioning whether 'ashrê is in fact to be interpreted as the antithesis of the cry of woe anyway.

In his Psalms in Israel's Worship Sigmund Mowinckel insists that there is no difference in meaning between "blessed" [barûkh] and the term "happy" ['ashrê] used in the beatitudes.(40) Lyder Brun likewise simply regards the beatitude as a weaker form of blessing just as he believes that the "woes" are a milder form of curse.(41) Artur Weiser in his commentary on the Psalms assumes the same kind of parallelism.(42) Cazelles, however, contends that a distinction should be made because the cry of happiness never refers to God, and because

---

39. W. JANZEN "ashrê in the Old Testament"

HTR 58 1965 215-226

40. MOWINCKEL The Psalms in Israel's Worship II 47

41. BRUN 39

42. WEISER "...the blessing of Yahweh was firmly rooted in the cultic tradition of the Temple and has more and more become the domain of the priest. The Beatitude, on the other hand, uses the salutation "Blessed is..." ['ašrê]. This is not a priestly blessing only, and presumably was the form in which the petition for blessing was uttered by the laity too; it was also adopted by the Wisdom literature." 87

"The connection of blessing and cursing with the cultic tradition of the Covenant of Yahweh, which is manifested also in the calling down of a curse upon those who do not comply with the demands made by the Covenant, has resulted in a parallel development of blessing and curse within the psalms. Thus the changing of the blessing into the salutation "Blessed" is matched by the transformation of the curse into a cry of woe ['oy] which was adopted by the prophets and the Wisdom literature." 88



"the desire for happiness...demands that the believer do certain things".(43) He must fear God; come to Zion; consider the poor; execute God's judgement against the enemies of the chosen people, and so forth. This conditional element in blessing is located by Westermann, in his analysis of the development of the Old Testament understanding of blessing, with the Deuteronomic writers. "At the earlier stage blessing was unconditional. When a person was blessed the blessing could not be withdrawn. In Deuteronomy, however, it is characteristic of the concept of blessing that by being connected with the covenant it is tied to the obedience of the people."(44)

As to the importance of the fact that the 'ashrê-cry never refers to God, it is Waldemar Janzen (45) who provides the best evidence for a proper distinction between blessing and beatitude. He accepts the established conclusions of Pedersen, Mowinckel and Hempel that the content of blessing concerns abundance of offspring, the fertility of flocks and herds, and the ability to defeat the enemy. In examining the 'ashrê passages he demonstrates that the basis for calling anyone 'ashrê is precisely the same as the basis for calling them barûkh. The hinge of his argument lies in the statement that "receipt of that which blessing has to bestow qualifies a person or group to be called "'AŠRÊ"'".(46) But the one who pronounces another 'ashrê is in no way the originator or inducer of blessing. These Old Testament macarisms "are not power-filled words meant to effect that state of blessing to

---

43. CAZELLES 446

44. WESTERMANN Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church 48

45. JANZEN 223

46. JANZEN 223



which they point".(47) 'Ashrê is the cry of an observer, witnessing someone else's good fortune. Janzen concludes that there has been considerable convergence of meaning between 'ashrê and barûkh, but that because the convergence is not complete any distinction must be significant. And it is the absolute reservation of 'ashrê for human beings that sets it apart from the word בָּרַךְ.

Janzen goes on to propose the thesis that 'ashrê differs from barûkh in that it expresses "envious desire". This is the distinctive element ensuring that the two could never be totally identified. "Praise, greeting, admonition may all be expressed through it, but only in a situation where a touch of envy is appropriate and gives them the peculiar 'aşrê-flavour."(48) 'aşrê hā'îš which is usually translated "happy is the man who..." should probably be "to be envied is the man..." / "enviable is the situation of the man..." / "beneidenswert ist, wer..."(49) This tinge of envy explains why the expression is never referred to God, why it never applies to the speaker [who has any grounds for envying himself?], and why it never refers to plants or animals or any object, and in harmony with what Janzen calls the psychology of envy the 'ashrê-description is commonly used with reference to the rich, the pious and so forth.(50) This proposal has the merit of accounting for the various strands of the discussion, but as Janzen himself recognises, the negative flavour of the concept militates against its use, for we need a better word to convey a sense of wistful longing...a neutral grammatical "optative" mood.

---

47. JANZEN 223

48. JANZEN 225

49. JANZEN 225

50. This is precisely why the New Testament beatitudes are so scandalous, because they seem to be claiming that the poor, those who mourn etc. are to be envied.

Most scholars are more cautious than Janzen in discussing the relationship of 'ashrê to barûkh, simply acknowledging that at the end of the Old Testament period there was a close relationship between the two, without being prepared to specify too precisely wherein that relationship consists. So, Thuruthumaly following Wehmeier writes: "...we think it reasonable to admit its similarity without taking it as a synonym of brk".(51) The recognition of a relationship between blessing and beatitude is in itself important because the 'ashrê material contributes to an understanding of the content of blessing even in those contexts which make no reference to the root בָּרַךְ.

[d] the relationship of אֵשֶׁרִי / בָּרַךְ to the cries of woe אֵי and הֵי.

As indicated above Lipiński sets out a parallelism between words of blessing and cursing. They achieve what they express. However, that parallelism, as hinted above, breaks down if it is insisted that the beatitudes and the cries of woe are compared. The expressions of happiness are descriptive of an observable state, already achieved, already granted, as the result of God's blessing. Expressions of woe, אֵי and הֵי [Greek οὐαί], on the other hand, are optative rather than descriptive of what is. They leave room for a change of heart which would turn aside the consequences of the cry of woe from the unfortunate victim of it.

Erhard Gerstenberger,(52) writing in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, challenges the contention of Mowinckel and of Westermann that the woe-form is derived from the curse.(53) Westermann classes the prophetic hôy as a "Weheruf" and as a significant form of the announcement of judgement [Gerichtsankündigung], but certainly having its origin in the curse.(54) In spite of his criticism of Mowinckel and Westermann, however, Gerstenberger himself considers that ׀׀ and ׀׀ are to curse what ׀׀ is to blessing. "The curse has its counterpart in the effective and authoritative blessing [׀׀]; in fact, oftentimes both are referred to together. Is there a similar counterpart for the woe-form? Such a counterpart obviously would have to be a more private blessing, a praise of someone doing right from the perspective of a detached observer."(55) As already noted, Janzen agrees that the cry of praise is the cry of a detached observer, but he has also demonstrated conclusively on the basis of his analysis of the biblical text that there is no real antithetical relationship between 'ashrê and hôi/ôi, a conclusion accepted as established by Cazelles in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*.(56) And Westermann too, whilst believing that the prophetic hôy-cry grows out of curse, is quite clear that blessing and curse have a different historical development.

---

52. E. GERSTENBERGER *JBL* 81 1962 249-263

53. MOWINCKEL *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* 50

A formal variety of the curse is the cry of woe: "Woe [hôy] to the man who..." From what was said above of the effect of the evil word, we gather that on the merits of the case there is no essential difference between the cursing word and the cry of woe."

54. WESTERMANN *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* 190-198

"...not only the form but also the content of the prophetic woe originated with the curse..." 198

55. GERSTENBERGER 260

56. CAZELLES 445



As to the specific Sitz im Leben of 'ashrê and hòi/'ôi, in his article in the Harvard Theological Review, Waldemar Janzen is reluctant to come to any conclusion in the belief that most scholars find it in accordance with their prior conclusions about the meaning of blessing and curse in Israel. Nonetheless, in his Mourning Cry and Woe Oracle, he is firm in his conclusion with regard to the prophets that accusation and announcement of evil meet where mourning for the dead shades over into cursing the guilty. "This shading over from sorrowful funerary lament on the one hand to invective against, yes, curse of, the guilty on the other embraces the whole range of content and mood found in the hây-passages, a range which offers a genuine Sitz im Leben as the home of hây, and which establishes an organic relationship between its apparently so diverse usages." (57) In believing the origin of the hây-cry to lie in the funerary lament Janzen is picking up a thread already in some measure pulled out by Richard J. Clifford. (58)

Until Clifford took issue with Gerstenberger and Westermann concerning the true origin of the hây-cry in his article "The Use of Hây in the Prophets" there had been a certain consensus of opinion that 'ashrê and hòi/'ôi were particularly associated with the cult and that they are at home in the Wisdom literature. (59) Again, Henri Cazelles in his dictionary article affirms that 'ashrê is a liturgical cry and he brings out forcefully the conditional element [as does

---

57. W. JANZEN Mourning Cry and Woe Oracle 27

58. R.J. CLIFFORD CBQ 28 1966 458-464

"The Use of Hây in the Prophets"

59. see KÄSER & GERSTENBERGER op.cit.

also W. SCHOTTROFF Der altisraelitische Fluchspruch



Westermann] (60) in that the desire for happiness lays demands upon the believer to do certain things, and Gerstenberger, building on this material comes to the conclusion that "the woe- as well as the bliss-formula had its origin in the wise men's reflections about the conditions of the world".(61) He believes that an integral part of the woe-oracle is a strong social concern, and in the hands of the wise men "may well have served educational purposes in that young people had to memorize catalogues of woes".(62) [cf. Isaiah 5.8ff; Habakkuk 2.6ff.] Willy Schottroff too believes that the prophets in using the woe-oracles are consciously referring back to the ethical instruction given to the young.(63) All this is of a piece with the recognition that in the development of the Israelite understanding of blessing and curse the conditional nature of happiness is seen to be tied to the correct observance of the Law and the avoidance of the counsels of the wicked.

If on the other hand it is accepted [following Janzen and Westermann] that there is no real antithetical relationship between 'ashrê and hôi/'ôi, and that blessing and curse have in fact separate histories in spite of many similarities, then the link with the Wisdom literature becomes less secure, certainly in terms of finding their origins there. Further, in consideration of the woe-cries alone, it then seems more probable that they stem from funerary lament rather than from the instruction of the young, for the latter implies a degree of

---

60. WESTERMANN Blessing

61. GERSTENBERGER 261

62. GERSTENBERGER 261

63. SCHOTTROFF 119

"Die 'הוֹי-Worte sind primär Mittel weisheitlicher Unterweisung und stehen in dieser Funktion dem weisheitlichen Mahn- und Warnwort nahe."

formalisation more in keeping with a developed position than with origins. So, Janzen is likely to be right when he concludes: "For hōy...the road from popular use to its Biblical employment by the prophets does not lead through Wisdom literature with its didactic interests, but through funerary lament with its distinctive complex of emotional manifestations."(64)

For the sake of completeness one further observation needs to be made in this area. Gunther Wanke rightly takes issue with Gerstenberger and others like him, who refer to hōi and 'ōi as if they are absolutely identical. They are to be distinguished in fact, writes Wanke, not only because they have different consonants but also because of the different grammatical contexts in which they occur.(65)

וֵי is a cry of dread and lamentation indicating danger or peril, whereas וֵי stems from a lamentation for the dead and is used for the strengthening of prophetic invective. Wanke's insistence on a distinction is accepted by Janzen. The specialized function of hōy in prophecy is acknowledged, but he writes: "Unless both words existed side by side earlier already, it is quite unthinkable that the slight phonetic and/or orthographical differentiation was introduced in this

---

64. JANZEN Mourning Cry 24

"A clear distinction between exclamations lamenting the dead and those bemoaning one's own or other's threatening, terrifying, or hopeless situation can seldom be drawn. Especially in the mourning context the mourner embraces the total situation into his wailing, as he moves from "Alas for you!" to "Woe is me!" with natural ease."

65. G. WANKE ZAW 78 1966 215-218

"Neben den grammatischen Besonderheiten verdiente auch die Streuung der beiden Worte über die alttestamentlichen Bücher etwas mehr Beachtung. Das Vorkommen des wesentlich häufiger belegten Wörtchen וֵי ist ausschliesslich auf die prophetischen Bücher beschränkt. וֵי hingegen findet sich nicht nur da, sondern auch in Weisheits-, Geschichts- und Liederbücher."

connection."(66) In any case, he believes that by the time of the Septuagint the two words had come together again and were no longer distinguished. None the less, with Wanke, there is no question of the origin of the woe-cry being in the Wisdom literature.(67)

#### D. The euphemistic use of $\text{קלל}$ .

There are six places in the Old Testament where  $\text{קלל}$  is used to convey the exactly opposite meaning, where the writers ought to have been able to write  $\text{קלל}$ .(68) [For a discussion of the exact meaning of  $\text{קלל}$ , see Brichto.](69) These passages are clearly meant to bear an interpretation the very antithesis of the plain sense. It is as if overstatement of blessing is understood in disparaging terms, mocking rather than praising God. Wehmeier, however, believes that in the course of time it was considered improper even to juxtapose the idea of cursing or reviling God with the name of God and that in such circumstances  $\text{קלל}$  was inserted to avoid any possibility of abuse of

66. JANZEN Mourning Cry 26

67. WANKE 218

"Berücksichtigt man all diese Beobachtungen, so wird man zugestehen müssen, dass die Verwendung der beiden Worte als Argument für eine Herleitung der prophetischen Weherufe aus weisheitlicher Tradition kaum brauchbar ist."

see also CLIFFORD 463-464

It is also possible that Clifford is right in thinking that the Septuagint and the Vulgate have played their part in blurring the distinction between the two. Furthermore, whereas they were previously distinct and separate in usage and meaning, the New Testament use of  $\text{ὀύκ}$  plus the dative to render the idea of 'woe' may have led translators to read back a uniform meaning into the Old Testament."

68. 1 Kings 21.10 & 13; Job 1.5 & 11; 2.5 & 9.

69. BRICHTO 176-177

He claims that  $\text{קלל}$  should be translated "to disparage" or "to hurl abuse at" rather than by "to curse".



Yahweh's name.(70)

Psalm 10.3 which is often discussed in this context is properly not a euphemism.(71) A comparison of the various English texts reveals how difficult this verse is to translate. It reads **וּבִצֵּעַ בֵּרַךְ נָאֵץ יְהוָה**. If it is maintained that **בֵּרַךְ** is here not a euphemism, its meaning would be "when the greedy blesses he is holding Yahweh in contempt".(72)

E. The use of **בֵּרַךְ** in names.

The root **בֵּרַךְ** is used in names in four forms.

[i] **בִּרְכִיָּה** [Berechiah and variants]

[ii] **בָּרוּךְ** [Baruch - Three different people, see Nehemiah 3.20; 11.5; Jeremiah 32; 36; 43; 45.]

[iii] **בִּרְכֵאל** [Barachel - Job 32.vv. 2 & 6]

[iv] **יִבְרֵכְיָה** [Jeberechiah - Isaiah 8.2] (73)

Jeberechiah, Wehmeier thinks, is a name which expresses the wish that Yahweh will bless the child who receives the name. The giving of this name is a plea on the part of the parents that their child may enjoy happiness and prosperity in the course of his life.(74) Berechiah, however, is a reference to the belief that part of the content of blessing is the giving of children. This name is therefore much more

70. WEHMEIER 165

"Offenkundig ist brk hier Euphemismus für qll. Dieser Sprachgebrauch ist wohl nicht darauf zurückzuführen, dass man beim Abschied 'segnete' und so jemanden 'den Abschied gab'; vielmehr wagte man von einer bestimmten Zeit an nicht mehr, das Verbum in Bezug auf Gott zu gebrauchen und ersetzte es nachträglich durch brk."

71. BRICHTO 170 footnote 117

72. BRICHTO 170 footnote 117

73. The bracketed forms are the usual English transliterations.

74. WEHMEIER 186



than the expression of thanksgiving for the gift of the child. The form Baruch is a prayer for the bearer of the name that he may thrive. Barachel, which only appears once, may well be an old form, since the use of theophoric names seems to have diminished in the period of the kings.

It is significant according to Wehmeier that the root  $\text{ברך}$  is used in the giving of names. The fact that it is used in this connection reveals some of the associations of the word  $\text{ברך}$ . Following Martin Noth, Wehmeier writes that the use of  $\text{ברך}$  in naming reveals a particular way of seeing God. In this area we do not meet the dreadful, awe-inspiring God of Sinai, who fights against the enemies of Israel. We meet the gentle, friendly God, who in the regular rhythms of nature dispenses fruitfulness, who protects the child and causes him to prosper, who is with human beings to support and help.(75) Klaus Seybold (76) in his description of the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6.22-27 picks up the thread found in the writings of Claus Westermann (77) and P.D. Miller (78) in making a distinction between the God who saves and the God who blesses. Whereas much traditional theology makes great play of the saving God, it has largely overlooked the importance of the blessing God. The God who saves from Egypt is also the God who provides a land flowing with milk and honey.

## 2.2. $\text{ברך}$ in translation.

---

75. WEHMEIER 186

76. SEYBOLD Der aaronitische Segen 49

77. WESTERMANN What does the Old Testament say about God?

78. MILLER Interpretation 29 1975 240-251

"The Blessing of God. An Interpretation of Numbers 6.22-27"

## A. The Septuagint [LXX]

### [i] εὐλογεῖν

The bulk of the Old Testament references to blessing employing the root  $\text{ל}\text{ב}\text{ח}$  are translated in the Septuagint by the Greek verb εὐλογεῖν.<sup>(79)</sup> In Greek literature the verb εὐλογεῖν means εὖ λέγειν, that is "to speak well" [in terms of style], or "to speak well of", "to praise" or "to extol".<sup>(80)</sup> The word εὐλογεῖν, however, appears little in Greek literature with the meaning "to bless", and so it is in being used in the Septuagint that its content is filled out with the rich meanings of the verb  $\text{ל}\text{ב}\text{ח}$ . It gains the whole range of meaning which already attaches to the Hebrew concept of blessing. It is used to describe God's blessing of human beings, both communally and individually, of animals and things. It is similarly used of human beings blessing God.

The process is, however, not in one direction only, for it is the translation of the participle  $\text{ל}\text{ב}\text{ח}\text{ת}$  which serves as a reminder that every translation is an interpretation. It is rendered either εὐλογητός or εὐλογημένος. Εὐλογητός is a verbal adjective describing a quality, a state or a disposition, whereas εὐλογημένος is a perfect participle expressing an action or the result of the blessing. Both are used in relation to God. For example:

Genesis 9.26 καὶ εἶπεν, Εὐλογητός κύριος ὁ θεὸς τοῦ Σημ.

Job 1.21 εἶη τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου εὐλογημένον.

But, in the vast majority of cases, a clear distinction is maintained. Εὐλογητός is used first and foremost of God, whereas εὐλογημένος is

---

79. BEYER TDNT II 754

80. BEYER TDNT II 754

used predominantly of human beings.

The familiar place where both appear together, illustrating the distinction is in Genesis 14.19ff. καὶ ηὐλόγησεν τὸν Ἀβραμ καὶ εἶπεν Εὐλογημένος Ἀβραμ τῷ θεῷ τῷ ὑψίστῳ, ὃς ἔκτισεν τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν, καὶ εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς ὁ ὑψιστος, ὃς παρέδωκεν τοὺς ἐχθρούς σου ὑποχείριους σου. Both εὐλογητός and εὐλογημένος translate the Hebrew בָּרַךְ and in the process a distinction is made between the blessing of God and the blessing of human beings, presumably in the belief that his creatures can "add" nothing to God by the act of blessing, whereas the human situation is improved and enhanced by God's blessing. So, whilst it is undoubtedly true that the Greek word εὐλογεῖν is filled with a new range of meaning in contact with the Hebrew word בָּרַךְ, it is also true that Greek theological presuppositions are at work as well, making a distinction which is not immediately visible in the Hebrew word itself. Indeed, Mowinckel is bold enough to declare that in the oldest layers of the root בָּרַךְ the expression יהוה יברך has the force of increasing and heightening the power of the Godhead.(81) Lyder Brun speaking of the Christian duty to bless God believes that the reason for it lies in the being of God himself. The primitive understanding of blessing as a means of increasing God's power and strength is excluded as much for the early Christian Church as it was for Judaism in the post-exilic period. Worship, however, does make a difference to God. His glory/honour [δόξα] can be augmented by human praise and

---

81. MOWINCKEL Psalmenstudien V 27

"Hinter diesem Segensschatz steht aber die Gottheit; in ihr hat der Segen seine Urquelle. So ist es in der ältesten Zeit auch Aufgabe des Kultleiters, des Segensvermittlers, wie es im letzten Grunde überhaupt Zweck des Kultes ist, die Macht und die Kraft der Gottheit zu steigern und zu erhöhen."



thanksgiving.(82)

Beyer in his dictionary article broaches this issue extremely tentatively. "We must ask," he writes, "whether the rendering of בָּרַךְ by εὐλογεῖν in the LXX does not in some sense give a new turn to the concept. Our answer can only be that already in the history of the Hebrew term there takes place the decisive development from primitive dealings with mysterious powers to the expression of man's spiritual relationship to God whose gracious disposition he constantly experiences from creation onwards, giving the response of praise and thanksgiving. The clear Greek word εὐλογεῖν, which means "to praise" in secular Greek, simply sets the seal on this development, excluding completely any magical or mystical understanding."(83)

There can be no doubt that there has been development in the understanding of blessing in the Hebrew Scriptures. This area is charted by Hempel, Mowinckel and Westermann in their respective ways. The concept of blessing which undoubtedly is understood in earliest times in magical terms, with the spoken word having almost automatic efficacy, is in Israelite religion subordinated to Yahweh, the source of all blessing. So, when Yahweh is blessed by a human being he is in the strict sense only being given back what already belongs to him. Thus Wehmeier contends that the expression בָּרַךְ יְהוָה is

---

82. BRUN 52

"Aber richtig ist allerdings, das nicht nur bei Paulus, sondern auch sonst im Urchristentum immer wieder vorausgesetzt wird, dass Gottes Ehre durch Lob und Dank der Menschen gemehrt werden kann und soll, dass ihm sonst die ihm zukommende Ehre vorenthalten bleibt, und dass er durch grösstmöglichen Lob und Dank angeregt wird, das Werk, wofür er gepriesen wird, fortzusetzen und zu fördern."

83. BEYER 759



indicative in meaning. It cannot possibly be optative. It is a declaration or proclamation of a fact. Yahweh is rich in blessing.(84) Elias Bickerman and Thomas Plassmann too insist that ברוך יהוה is indicative. "Modern translators are wrong to wipe out this distinction between the indicative and the optative. They render the past participle of the qal baruk by "blessed be". The ancient translators were better advised: εὐλογητός [εὐλογημένος] and benedictus are declaratory expressions and not wishes."(85) "Truly, there is no other subject within the purview of the Semite more worthy of the predicate ברוך or בריך than is God. And hence he applies the term to him in all the fulness of its significance, not in an optative, but in an assertory sense."(86) "...it appears that...the form εὐλογητός expresses [at least as conceived by the translators] the quality "blessed" as inhering or residing in the respective persons or objects."(87) Nevertheless, acknowledging that development has taken place, that blessing was removed from the area of magic and recognised as having its origin in Yahweh, that does not necessarily mean accepting with Beyer that the use of εὐλογεῖν "simply sets the seal on this development".(88) It is still worth asking how far the use of εὐλογεῖν with its basic Greek meaning of "to praise" played a part in that development, for the Greek "God" whose attributes include aseity, immutability, impassibility, to whom blessing can "add" nothing, is not easily identified with the Lord of Hosts, the living God of Israel.

---

84. WEHMEIER 128

"Dennoch spricht alles für die Annahme, dass baruk jhwh von Haus aus nicht Aufforderung zum Lobe war, sondern Proklamation "reich an Segen ist Jahwe".

85. BICKERMAN 527

86. PLASSMANN 121

87. PLASSMANN 122 Note

88. BEYER 759

The God of the Greek philosophers and the God of the prophets are not inevitably to be adjudged to be one and the same.(89)

[ii] αἰνεῖν [to praise]

There is only one occurrence of the verb, in Psalm 100.4. It is hazardous to build any theory on one single example. It may simply be a mistake, the translator[s] failing on this one occasion to be consistent in their use of εὐλογεῖν. It may be an attempt to vary the vocabulary in a context where many "praise" words appear [although the variation could as easily have been εὐλογεῖν]. The Vulgate follows the Septuagint maintaining the distinction between αἰνεῖτε and εὐλογεῖτε by rendering it "laudate" instead of "benedicite".

[iii] ἐπεύχεσθαι [to pray]

The two references, Deuteronomy 10.8 & 1 Chronicles 23.13, are parallels and treated by commentators as one. Some regard them as interpolations, which would explain the difference in vocabulary. The words ἐπεύχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ translate וְלִבְרָךְ בְּשִׁמּוֹ.

[iv] ἐπιφημιζεῖν

There is only one place in the Old Testament [Deuteronomy 29.19 -

---

89. There is a growing literature in this area. See especially  
 A. HESCHEL The Prophets  
 T. FRETHERM The Suffering of God  
 H. KNIGHT The Hebrew Prophetic Consciousness  
 E. JACOB "Le Dieu Souffrant, un thème vétérotestamentaire"

cf. Wisdom 2.12] where this verb occurs as a translation of the hithpael of  $\text{ךב}$ . It is future and middle voice.  $\kappa\alpha\iota \acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota\phi\eta\mu\acute{\iota}\sigma\eta\tau\alpha\iota$  translates  $\text{ךבךבךב}$ . It means "to utter words ominous of an event". The hithpael rendered in the English of the RSV as "blesses himself" seems in its context to suggest that what is said in the heart is somewhat complacently or smugly believed. "Here it means precisely: "He shall say to himself with complacence [saying] that..." or "He shall think himself blessed saying that..."(90) Having understood the text in this sense the Septuagint translators expressed it by the middle voice, future tense of  $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota\phi\eta\mu\acute{\iota}\sigma\epsilon\iota\nu$ .

[v]  $\acute{\epsilon}\upsilon\chi\alpha\rho\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\iota\nu$  [to be thankful, to give thanks]

The important thing to note is the almost total absence of  $\acute{\epsilon}\upsilon\chi\alpha\rho\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\iota\nu$  from the Septuagint. In the New Testament it is a word that increases as  $\acute{\epsilon}\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\epsilon\iota\nu$  decreases. Its use in the New Testament suggests that the heart of early christian worship and action was thanksgiving. A theological shift took place so that the followers of the New Way focussed their praise of God on the  $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$  which is at the heart of  $\acute{\epsilon}\upsilon\chi\alpha\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{\iota}\alpha$ , very much under the influence of Paul, whose characteristic greeting is not just  $\acute{\epsilon}\iota\rho\acute{\eta}\nu\eta$  [ $\text{שלום}$ ] but  $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma \upsilon\mu\acute{\iota}\nu \kappa\alpha\iota \acute{\epsilon}\iota\rho\acute{\eta}\nu\eta$  [cf. Romans 1.7]. Where  $\acute{\epsilon}\upsilon\chi\alpha\rho\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\iota\nu$  does appear in the Septuagint and the Apocrypha it is an expression of gratitude, with God as object and man as the subject. It usually translates the Hiphil form of the verb  $\text{ךב}$ . However, the relationship between



*εὐχαριστεῖν* and the concept of blessing is a study in itself (91)

## B. The Vulgate

### [i] *benedicere*

*Benedicere* is the word used in the vast majority of places to translate *ברך*. To find anything else is exceptional. Made up of the same constituent elements as *εὐλογεῖν*, to speak well, *bene dicere*, this word has reinforced for the Latin-speaking West that blessing is essentially something spoken rather than something done, *bene facere*. It has given linguistic support to the notion that blessing is about speaking the powerful word.

### [ii] *laudare*

In the few cases where *laudare* appears it means straightforwardly "praise". In Psalm 100.4 the Vulgate preserves the *αἰνεῖτε* of the Septuagint text as it also follows the Septuagint in Proverbs 10.7, *cum laudibus* picking up *μετ' ἐγκωμίων*. The use of *laudare* in Proverbs 28.20 to translate *ברך-בְּרָכָה*, a verb to translate the noun, does not really capture the richness of the blessing which belongs to the "wise man".

### [iii] *Salutare*

---

91. See in particular BRUN 176-177

J-P. AUDET RB 65 1958 371-399

"Esquisse historique du genre littéraire de la 'bénédiction' juive et de l' 'eucharistie' chrétienne"



Even in normal circumstances of meeting and parting the Vulgate prefers to use *benedicere*. *Salutare* does, however, appear in 1 Samuel 13.10 [*ut salutare eum*] and 2 Kings 4.29 [*non salutes eum*].

[iv] *sermonem impleverat; et gratias ageret; congratulari*

There are three places where the context clearly determines the translation. In Genesis 27.30 Isaac completes the blessing of Jacob, so that *sermonem impleverat* simply means "he finished speaking".

In 2 Samuel 8.10 the Vulgate uses *gratias agere* to translate בָּרַךְ. The son of King Toi is sent by his father to thank David for defeating Hadadezer, their common enemy. He brings with him gifts of silver, gold and bronze. Presumably he "thanks" David in the terminology of the Vulgate rather than blessing him because he is not a worshipper of Yahweh. The Massoretes do not, however, scruple to use וַיְבָרֶכְהוּ.

1 Chronicles 18.10 is the parallel to 2 Samuel 8.10. Here the Vulgate uses *congratulari* for וַיְבָרֶכְהוּ. He greets him and congratulates him on the defeat of Hadadezer. The translation fits the context, although it does not carry the nuance of "bestowing gifts" in the way in which בָּרַךְ does.

### C. English, French, German

The various English translations employ a variety of words to translate בָּרַךְ, bless, praise, thank, greet and congratulate. There can be no doubt that the choice of word is determined by the context. Problems arise in modern English as soon as it is necessary to translate the single participle בָּרַךְ. The Septuagint Greek employs

either *εὐλογητός* or *εὐλογημένος*. A choice is made between the two on theological grounds but only one word is used. In Latin *benedictus*, one word, is used retaining the possibility that that one word will embrace the richness as well as the ambiguity of *ברך*. In English translators must choose between "Blessed is..." and "blessed be..." when the context may not help them to make the distinction. The decision is often made on the basis of prior theological assumptions or beliefs about the nature of God. Can God change or be changed? Can God be enriched or his being/reputation/glory enhanced? The answers to such questions may well determine how *ברך* is translated and the underlying presuppositions may often be unacknowledged.

A further difficulty in English is that the word "blessing" itself is capable of varying meaning. It may mean "an act of blessing". It may mean "a specific formula of blessing". It may indicate the content of the event. To make matters worse it is often confused with the idea of consecration or dedication. As in Hebrew the word blessing can have an antithetical sense, i.e. meaning "to curse". [cf. "Your neighbour will bless you if you bang your garage door at two o'clock in the morning."]

In French the words chosen to translate *ברך* are equally varied, *bénir*, *louer*, [se] *glorifier*, *saluer*. Which one is used is again determined by the context. The French language too has to choose two words rather than one to render *ברך*. "*Béni soit...*" is by far the most usual and it is based on a prior assumption about what God is like. "*La bénédiction*" has many of the ambiguities of the English word "blessing".

In some ways German is more precise than English in this area. It distinguishes between "*der Segen*" and "*das Segnen*", blessing and the



act of blessing. It also has the word "Segnung" which similarly can mean "the act of blessing" or "a blessing formula". The words "Benediktion" and "benedizieren" exist but are used infrequently. German has furthermore the word "Weihe" for the consecration or dedication of things, which avoids some of the cruder notions that can attach themselves to blessing in English.

German translators have a variety of words available to translate בָּרַךְ, including segnen, loben, preisen, danken, gratulieren and grüssen, where the choice is made according to the context. They have the same difficulties as in English or French in translating בָּרַךְ, in deciding whether בָּרַךְ יְהוָה is optative or a description of the way God is in himself. Gesegnet sei..., gelobt sei, or gepriesen sei..., all of these are optative. In order to describe the way in which God himself is blessed, the German translators resort to paraphrase like "Reich an Segen ist Jahwe". The choice of words is again based on what the translator believes about the nature of God.

### 2.3. Observations on method.

[a] Fascinating as the etymological study of בָּרַךְ is in establishing the antecedents of the concept of blessing, it is a blind alley. None of the scholars who take this approach manage to account for all the strands. To identify magical elements persisting in the biblical understanding of blessing is interesting in itself. By asking why the biblical editors have tried to purge ancient folk stories of their magical elements may help to understand how the concept of blessing has grown and developed but it will also be instructive in relation to what the biblical writers believe about God. Those who express whether directly or obliquely a theology of blessing will inevitably

bring to the task their understanding of the nature of Yahweh. This is more likely to be revealed by the context in which blessing is described rather than by struggling with the etymology of the Hebrew word.(92) It is only possible to discern the meaning of בָּרַךְ in each case by careful study of the context in which it appears.

[b] The biblical writers themselves had their theological presuppositions concerning the nature of God. Equally those modern scholars who have explored the concept of blessing, even those who have taken an etymological approach, have all had their distinctive theological orientation and hermeneutical baggage. Mowinckel, for example, brought his assumptions about the centrality of worship to the study, so that he finds "the cult" everywhere as the key to his understanding of what blessing is about. As indicated above, Westermann rightly observes that Mowinckel is more interested in the phenomenology of blessing than in its development. The description of blessing in terms of fertility and prosperity is not hard to find in many contexts but the extension of that picture to include notions about vitality and the life-force which are found in Pedersen and Hempel are found only by importation from other anthropological settings, so that "mana" in other cultures is discovered in the biblical text. The biblical writers had their idées fixes, as in the case of the Yahwist, who appears to have the set purpose of legitimating the claims of the first kings of Israel.(93) Modern researchers are, however, not free from philosophical and theological assumptions which

---

92. see J.L. AUSTIN How to do things with Words

J.BARR The Semantics of Biblical Language

A.C. THISELTON "The Supposed Power of Words in the Biblical Writings"

93. cf. MATTSON The Blessing Themes in the Abraham Story



are easily imported into the biblical text.

[c] The comparison of בָּרַךְ with אֲשֶׁרִי and related concepts, including an examination of its relationship with cursing and woe, reveals that though related they have separate histories. There are ten times as many references to בָּרַךְ as there are to אֲשֶׁרִי. אֲשֶׁרִי seems to belong more to the Wisdom literature than to the rest of the Hebrew corpus. However, a study of אֲשֶׁרִי helps to establish what was considered to be the content of blessing although it is clearly the exclamation of an observer, which cannot in any way be considered to be performative. The comparison of blessing words with cursing words reveals the fragility of conclusions which are read off from one set of ideas to another. Yet what is clear is that both sets of words have undergone a series of development.

[d] A study of the relationship of the root בָּרַךְ to the macarisms of the Old Testament is in itself sufficient to indicate that the importance of blessing is not limited to the uses of בָּרַךְ. There are many places in the Old Testament, with many examples in the Psalms and in the prophets, where "good" is wished upon another, where prosperity is asked for or observed in another. The content of that good fortune varies from context to context, but that the person concerned is blessed is clear in multiple instances where the word בָּרַךְ does not occur. It is blessing none the less. Shalom and covenant are part of the environment in which blessing lives and a study of them will make its contribution to the wholeness of any theology of blessing.

[e] Recognizing that there are various strands woven together to form the developed corpus of Hebrew writings, it will be necessary to

determine whether it is possible to speak of a theology of blessing in the singular, or whether there are in fact different theologies in the different strands. If so, how is the theology of blessing in the Yahwist different from the theology of blessing in the deuteronomic writings?

[f] There are many authors who have located the concept of blessing against the wider background of the "powerful word". Just as curse, which had a different subsequent historical development, springs from the power of what is said, so blessing too has to be understood against this back-cloth.<sup>(94)</sup> Again the understanding of the nature of God which such a notion implies must be examined in order to determine where it fits into the development of the theology of blessing.

[g] In looking at the use of  $\text{ברך}$  in the giving of names, it was claimed by Wehmeier that in this context there is a distinction to be made between the awe-inspiring God of Sinai and the gentle, friendly God invoked in name-giving. In examining the theology of the various strands of the Jewish scriptures it remains to be determined whether a distinction between the saving God and the blessing God can be

---

94. L.DÜRR Die Wertung des göttlichen Wortes im alten Testament und im antiken Orient

J. GUILLET Rech SC Rel 57 1969 163-204

"La Langue spontanée de la bénédiction dans l' Ancien Testament"

O. GREYER Name und Wort im alten Testament

P. HEINISCH Personifikationen und Hypostasen im Alten Testament und Alten Orient

J. HEMPEL Festschrift Alfred Bertholet zum 80 Geburtstag

"Wort und Schicksal"

B. LANDSBERGER Mitteilungen der altorientalischen Gesellschaft 4 1929 294-321 "Das 'gute' Wort"

J.Z. LAUTERBACH HUCA 14 1939 287-302

"The Belief in the Power of the Word"

J. SZERUDA Das Wort Jahwes - eine Untersuchung zur israelitischen-jüdischen Religionsgeschichte



sustained. Is the God of the conquest of Canaan different from the God who ensures the fertility of the land of Canaan? Certainly Wehmeier's proposal linking the blessing God with the use of בָּרַךְ in names is rather coy. There seems no obvious reason why a name in which Yahweh is blessed should not be found in relation to the dreadful, awe-inspiring God of Sinai. Giving such a name might be considered a declaration of their adherence to and worship of Yahweh on the part of the parents.

[h] Even a cursory examination of the various translations of the scriptures reveals that to translate is to interpret. In any study of the rich word בָּרַךְ questions must be asked concerning the translators' hermeneutical presuppositions and their prior understanding of what God is like. As illustrated above בָּרַךְ is susceptible of differing translation in different contexts. It is in Hebrew a many-layered concept which may be impoverished or distorted in translation or given nuances not in the original word. The translator must be kept under constant scrutiny if he is not to betray the text. *Traduttori sono traditori*. To get back into the intention of the original authors constant attention must be paid to Leonard Hodgson's famous question in his Gifford Lectures: "What must the truth be, and have been, if it appeared like that to men who thought and wrote as they did?"

[i] It is in the spirit of Hodgson's question that in chapters 3-8 below each strand is treated separately and in its own right. Each has been examined under the same three headings, [a] God blessing people, [b] people blessing God, and [c] people blessing people. This is in order to facilitate later comparison, although it must be freely acknowledged that not every single reference fits snugly into such a classification.

None the less the grouping of the material in this way is to be justified in terms of making it more manageable than it would be if left without any signposts. In chapters 3-8 it is intended to ask what theological implications there are in what each group of writers has to say about blessing. What *in their terms* is God like and what things flow from their insights into the nature of God?



## Part II Contextual Analysis

### Chapter 3

#### The Theology of Blessing in the Yahwist

##### 3.1 God blessing people

The Yahwist begins his history on the broad canvas of creation. God is first and foremost creator. He has made everything that is, including the whole human race. However, thereafter, because of human sin, Yahweh begins a process of divine selectivity which focusses initially, amongst the children of Noah, on Shem [Genesis 9.27]. The description of the relationship between Shem, Ham and Japheth is a literary device to explain the political situation at the time in which the Yahwist is writing.<sup>(1)</sup> Abraham is a Shemite [Genesis 11.27-32].

The Yahwist then introduces one of his great flagship themes which, because of its importance, deserves to be quoted in full [Genesis 12.1-3,7a]: "Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves." Footnote: [Or "*in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*"] Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, "To your descendants I will give this land."

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם לֵךְ-לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלֶדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ

---

1. BRUEGGEMANN 90

אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָה : וְאָעֲשֶׂה לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְאֶבְרַכָּה וְאֶגְדָּלָה שְׁמִי  
וְהָיָה בְּרַכָּה : וְאֶבְרַכָּה מְבָרְכֶיהָ וּמְקַלְלָהָ אָאֵר וְנִבְרַכְוּ בָּהּ כָּל מִשְׁפַּחַת  
הָאָדָמָה : וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר לְזִרְעָה אֲתָן אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת

Why were these verses written? According to Gunkel: to answer the question "wie sind die Völker, die sich nach Abraham und Lot nennen, entstanden und zu diesen Ländern gekommen?"(2) "Auch die folgenden Verheissungen antworten auf die Fragen der Gegenwart: weshalb ist Israel ein so weitberühmtes, gottgesegnetes Volk? und beziehen sich also zugleich auf Abrahams Nachkommen..."(3) He believes that these things have been fulfilled in the time of the writer, at the time of Israel's greatest wealth and prosperity. Westermann likewise sees the promise of Genesis 12.1-3,7a as applying to the people of Israel at the height of worldly power. The promise of greatness "does not mean that Abraham will be renowned some time later, but that the great people which has grown out of the blessing given to him will also be a people of renown. Greatness and name [renown] go together; both will belong to Israel. The formulation of a promise made to Abraham, but reaching fulfillment only in the period of the monarchy, is best thought of in the era of David-Solomon, that is, at the time of the Yahwist."(4) It is Daniel Mattson who demonstrates by analysis of the formulaic structure of the blessing themes in the Abraham stories that they are the product of the period of the kingdom of David and Solomon.(5) In

---

2. GUNKEL 132

3. GUNKEL 135

4. WESTERMANN Genesis I 150

5. MATTSON examines carefully the arguments adduced by John van SETERS in his Abraham in History and Tradition in which he concludes that the work of the Yahwist should be assigned a date in the mid first millennium B.C. [MATTSON 17-34] MATTSON's own conclusion is that "the blessings were preserved because of their usefulness to the dynastic state." 88

See E.W. NICHOLSON's review of van SETERS in JTS 1979 Vol. XXX.



fact their precise significance at this high point in Israel's history is to be found in their legitimation of Israel's claim to the land of Canaan. "Israel's right to the land was based on the promise and oath given to Abram." (6) The promise of greatness of Genesis 12.1-3 is paralleled in Genesis 46.1-5 and the people's progress towards Canaan is anticipated in Genesis 11.27-32. (7)

A number of tensions show through the story of God's promises to Abraham as it has been handed down. These tensions may well relate to the fact that the Yahwist is reflecting on and seeking theological justification for the actual situation of his own day. "The Yahwist, the theologian of the monarchical period, has, in the promise of 12:2-3, inserted his own prolog to the patriarchal story into this introduction; it forms at the same time the linchpin reaching backwards to the primeval story and forwards to the history of the people." (8) What he has done is achieved with consummate skill. Genesis 12.1-3 not only becomes the cradle out of which all future Israelite history is to grow. It also reaches back and links with the prehistory of the people.

The story of God's promise of numerous progeny to Abram sounds initially impossible of fulfilment since Sarai is barren [11.30]. The dramatic effect of the events is heightened because Abraham does not hesitate. "So Abram went out, as the LORD had told him..." [12.4]. (9) The

---

6. MATTSON 203-206

7. WESTERMANN Genesis I 147

"What is promised to Abraham points to the future Israel. It is the blessing that sheltered and accompanied Abraham, the effects of which are to extend to the Israel of the monarchy and beyond that to all the families of the earth."

8. WESTERMANN Genesis I 158

9. See COATES 107

tension at this point is reflected in Gunkel's commentary. He feels that the language of "leaving this place" is the language of a sedentary people, whereas in fact Abraham was a nomad. Terah moves from one place where he was settled to another place where he settled. He moves from Ur to Haran and stays there, whereas Abraham goes on. Furthermore, against the odds, Abraham believes God's promise and obeys his command.(10)

There is no doubt that the content of blessing is the promise of countless descendants. But not just that. It also includes fame and renown. "I will make of you a great nation" and "make your name great". At no time would this be more true than in the period of the monarchy. It was also at the height of David's power that possession of the land was at its most secure. Blessing is not simply that Abraham's descendants will be great in number. They will be great in influence and God will give them the land of Canaan [12.7a], possession of the land being integral to the concerns of Abraham's descendants at the time of David and Solomon.(11) However, all that is promised is "a necessary concomitant of the command in v.1..."(12)

In the writings of the Yahwist, blessing is the over-arching concept which includes everything else. As Westermann writes: "What is decisive for the meaning of the word in the Old Testament is that

10. GUNKEL 136

"So sollen wir Abraham beurteilen: er ist der Gläubige, Gehorsame und darum Gesegnete."

11. HOFMEIER 14

"...die Bilder der Vielheit der Nachkommenschaft benützt werden um die künftige Macht Israels zu betonen. In den Verheissungen des Landes wird das Fundament gelegt für das Volk und seine Religion."

12. WESTERMANN Genesis I 148



God's blessing does not show its effects in individual acts and deeds, but in a continual process."(13) The people of Israel live in a state of blessing in much the same way that Christians might talk about being in a state of grace. Blessing itself is a backcloth against which everything else happens.

It is, however, misleading to talk about the unconditional nature of God's promise to Abraham, as some writers do. Its enactment depends in fact on Abraham's faithful obedience to the perceived will of God and the promise of land is only unconditional in the sense that no formal link is made between Abraham's obedience and the acquisition of the land. No explanation is offered as to why he should be rewarded by taking possession of Canaan rather than in any other way.(14) None the less, for those who come after Abraham God has made their attitude to Abraham the touchstone of blessing. It is their response to him which will determine whether or not they are included in the scope of the promise. Abraham will be "a blessing", "a source of blessing".(15) "the impersonation of blessing, most blessed", (16) "a name to bless by".(17) It is through him that God's favourable disposition to his children will flow out, first of all and preeminently to the people of Israel but then also to the rest of the world. For Abraham God's blessing is the guarantee of God's protection. It will be his security as he steps out into the unknown. It is essentially, however, a corporate

13. WESTERMANN Genesis I 149

14. HOFTIJZER 1

"Die Zusage des Landes ist beim Jahwisten noch ein rein natürliches Gegebenes und befindet sich noch auf dem Boden der alten Volksreligion. Nach dem Wie und Warum wird nicht gefragt, von einer Gegenleistung der Empfänger ist nicht die Rede."

15. MITCHELL 30, et al.

16. DRIVER 144

17. SKINNER 244 [pointing בְּרָכָה]

concept. Inclusion in the promise to Abraham/Israel depends on being favourably disposed to Abraham/Israel, on blessing him. To show ill-will to Abraham/Israel, revile him, will bring down the wrath of God on those who are so unwise. There is no justification for the individualizing and personalizing tendencies in writers like Joyce Baldwin.<sup>(18)</sup> Blessing is the corporate context in which the descendants of Abraham live together with those who wish them well.

"And by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves." More ink has been spilled trying to resolve the issues relating to this verse than almost any other in the Hebrew Scriptures. Every commentator takes up a stance. Some try to have it both ways.<sup>(19)</sup> Is the niphal form of the verb [וַיְבָרְכוּ בְךָ כָּל מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאָדָמָה] to be translated as a passive or is it reflexive in meaning? Westermann comes down on the reflexive side but that is hardly consistent with his contention that blessing is a climate rather than a series of events. The introduction into the language of a proverbial form of blessing would indeed be expressed by a reflexive form.<sup>(20)</sup> A climate of blessing would be better expressed by the passive.

---

18. BALDWIN 31 "How would Abraham recognize the blessing of God in his life? As the narrative unfolds the answers will appear, but they will be of two kinds: a. personal and private and b. outward and visible."

19. cf von RAD 156 "The unusual *nibr<sup>e</sup>kū*, to which the Yahwist gives preference against the *hithpael* for this promise, can be translated reflexively ("bless oneself"); but the passive is also possible."

20. see GUNKEL 135

"Dein Name soll »ein Segenswort werden«, d.h. man wird einstens noch sagen: »mögest auch du gesegnet werden wie ehedem Abraham«..."

"»sich mit jemandem segnen« bedeutet: jemandes Namen beim Segensspruch erwähnen, d.h. wenn man sich etwas Gutes wünscht, sich nichts Besseres wünschen können als das Schicksal des Betreffenden..."



The wide-ranging debate about this phrase makes it clear in the end that the question of niph'al or hithpael cannot be settled by linguistic means.(21) The way in which the verses are translated depends more on a theological decision than on linguistic analysis. Westermann contends that the theological conclusion is the same whether the reflexive or passive is used. "There is ... no opposition in content between the passive and reflexive translation..."(22) He further declares that the linguistic argument is "otiose".(23) Speiser, although not as ready as Westermann to dismiss the linguistic evidence, is surely correct in maintaining that there is a theological distinction to be made between the two forms. That the nations of the earth should use Abraham's name as a byword for blessing or in a formula in which to call down blessing upon themselves or even on others [the reflexive use of the verb] is one thing. That they should be included as an integral part of God's intention in making the promise to Abraham is quite another.(24)

The same theme is taken up again in Genesis 18.18. וְנִבְרָכוּ בּוֹ כָּל גּוֹיִם . In this context Abraham receives the messengers of Yahweh hospitably and is given the promise of a son. His visitors depart and

---

21. MITCHELL 33

"The context and usage, not grammatical form, are the surest guide to meaning."

22. WESTERMANN I 152

23. WESTERMANN 152

24. SPEISER 86

"What the clause means, therefore, is that the nations of the world will point to Abraham as their ideal, either in blessing themselves (Dr.), or one another (Ehrl.). The passive, on the other hand, would imply that the privileges to be enjoyed by Abraham and his descendants shall be extended to other nations. The distinction may be slight on the surface, yet it is of great consequence theologically. Nor may one disregard the evidence from linguistic usage."

Abraham sets them off on the road to Sodom. Then Yahweh reflects within himself whether or not he should tell Abraham what is going to happen there. However, because he has chosen him to be the mediator of blessing to the nations, God decides to tell Abraham so that the children of Abraham may be warned by the fate of the people of Sodom as to the consequences of disobeying their God.

The story of Abraham's intercession on behalf of Sodom need not detain us. It is, however, clear that Abraham's election to be the channel of blessing is not due to anything he has done himself. It is by God's choice. "I have chosen him..."(25) There is here in 18.18 a repetition of the theme of chapter 12.3b. Again the niph'al form of *ברך* is used [וַיְבָרֶכְהוּ] but all the families [מִשְׁפָּחַת הָאָדָמָה] of the earth have become all the peoples of the land [כָּל גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ]. Driver translates "through him", making it plain that as in 12.3b God's intention is that his chosen people will be the channel through which his blessing is to be communicated to the world.(26) Abraham who is without children is to be "a great and mighty nation". The content of the blessing is again numerous descendants who are to "keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice". In so doing they will be the fulfilment of God's promise.

A similar message is inserted in a reinforcing way by the redactor of Genesis into chapter 22. However, on this occasion [22.15-18] the hithpael is used instead of the niph'al [וַהֲתַבָּרַכוּ... אֲבָרְכָהּ... בְּרַךְ אֲבָרְכָהּ...]. There can, however, be little question but

---

25. GUNKEL 153

"In den alten Sagen werden Jahves Verheissungen an die Väter stets ohne Bedingung gegeben."

26. DRIVER 148 & 195



that the intention of the redactor is to convey the same meaning as in Genesis 12.3b where the verb form is niph'al. However, the clear recognition of the nature of 22.15-18 as an addition to the text would suggest that it is the hithpael form - which in itself must be regarded as reflexive - which is being conformed to the niph'al of 12.3b.

After the death of Abraham the Yahwist history continues with a cycle of stories concerning Abraham's son Isaac. [וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי מוֹת] [אֲבִרְהָם וַיְבָרַךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ] Without entering into the structural questions concerning Genesis 25 it is clear, with von Rad, that "now the promise given to Abraham's seed is represented by Isaac alone".(27) God's blessing of Isaac is the sign of the succession, and since all the other branches of Abraham's family are given many descendants as well as him, it is again implicitly suggested that the succession through Isaac rather than any other son is a matter of God's choice. The multiplicity of Abraham's seed is consonant with the blessing of all human beings as God's creatures. It is the settling upon Isaac of God's promise which makes him different from his brothers. It is through him and not through the others that God will keep faith with faithful Abraham.

God has indeed blessed Abraham in all things [וַיְהִי בֵרַךְ 24.1] [אֶת-אֲבִרְהָם בְּכָל]. He has given him children but it is through Isaac, Sarah's only son, that the succession is to take place. The search for a bride for Isaac is integral to the story-line. It is a master-piece of the story-teller's art. God has kept his word and prospered Abraham in every part of his life [see also 24.35]. Even his advanced age is to

---

27. von RAD 257

be understood as integral to God's blessing.(28) Abraham's servant is charged to seek a bride for his master's son from amongst his kinsfolk.

He sets out on his journey and eventually arrives at a well where he makes his camels kneel.(29) He is given spontaneous and ready help by Rebekah. The servant recognizes in her the fulfilment of his commission.

Laban, Rebekah's brother, greets the stranger as "the blessed of the LORD" [Genesis 24.31 בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה]. It is used as "a title of high regard".(30) Mitchell is right to say [contra Wehmeier & Plassmann] that the context of 24.31 requires the translation: "Come in, you who have been blessed by Yahweh!"(31) Both Wehmeier and Plassmann believe that the phrase is stative and that the construct indicates ownership. However, Laban is in fact simply responding to the evidence of his eyes. He sees the wealth of the emissary and says: "You must indeed be blessed by Yahweh!" After all, their visitor's apparent prosperity is adequate testimony to the fact, and once Bethuel's family have appreciated that Abraham's servant is not there on his own behalf, he could be called "Blessed of the LORD" simply as Abraham's representative.

The servant then speaks of the way in which God has blessed his master. The blessing consists in the sheer volume of wealth that he possesses... flocks and herds; silver and gold; menservants and maidservants; camels and asses. Then in addition Yahweh has given

---

28. MITCHELL 67

29. nb the use of the root קָנַע with the meaning "to kneel"

30. WESTERMANN I 388

DRIVER 235

31. MITCHELL 68

Abraham a son in his old age, when his wife was beyond the age of child-bearing. Furthermore, and a vital part of the servant's argument, Abraham has given all his wealth to his son Isaac, for whom he is seeking Rebekah's hand in marriage.

The Yahwist's purpose in recording the Isaac material which contains many repetitions of the Abrahamic cycle can only be to link Isaac effectively to the promises made to Abraham. Westermann describes the join between the two as "by means of a theological clamp"!(32) However, the passage teaches us little that is new about the content of blessing. Here the land is definitely a part of the promise. Isaac's descendants will be multiplied "as the stars of heaven" [cf. Genesis 15.5; 22.17]. "By your descendants all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves." The hithpael not the niphal is used and there can be little doubt that the nations are to consider themselves fortunate to be in relationship with Israel. "The narrative wants to say to the contemporary generation that the promise given to the patriarchs confers standing and honor on the people of Israel that the kings of the nations must recognize [1 Kings 10]."(33)

There are those who consider the reference to Isaac planting grain as anachronistic, for Isaac's people were still bedouin. Be that as it may, the grain is described as plentiful. In the eyes of the Yahwist blessing is rich harvest. Isaac's flocks and herds increase too and the number of people in his household grows. All of this is because God is with him [וַיֵּשֶׁב יִשְׂחָק עִמָּה וַאֲבִרְכָהּ]. There is an intimate connection between experiencing blessing and experiencing the presence of God [26.24 וְיִשְׂחָק יָשָׁב עִמָּה וַאֲבִרְכָהּ].

---

32. WESTERMANN Genesis II 424

33. WESTERMANN Genesis II 428



[. אַתָּה אָנֹכִי וּבִרְכִיָּהּ]

In all of this note the controversy about the ownership of the water supply. Digging wells and finding water are closely tied to the fertility of the land. This tribal group, which at the outset fears Abimelech's people, prospers and becomes so strong that Abimelech and his aides come to Isaac to bind themselves to him by oath, to make a covenant of peace. Whereas God formerly blessed Abraham, Isaac is now "the blessed of the LORD" [26.29 *אַתָּה עֲתָה בֵּרוּךְ יְהוָה*]. God has so given him wealth and strength that the only wise thing to do is to ensure that they share in his prosperity by entering into a covenant relationship with him and his people. The Yahwist's contemporaries are being given a clear message about what the nations should do if they want to prosper.

Isaac's good fortune is his inheritance. It is not by reason of anything that he himself has deserved. It is because he is his father's son. God made his promise to faithful Abraham and Isaac is blessed by the presence of God "for my servant Abraham's sake" [26.24]. However, having established that the succession is through Isaac the Yahwist does not delay with him for long. The inheritance is to be passed on to another who has done nothing in himself to deserve it.

The re-iterated theme "and by you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth bless themselves [Or be blessed]" [וּבִרְכוּ בְּךָ] occurs again in the well-known story of Jacob at Bethel [Genesis 28]. The story does not in itself add to our understanding of blessing. The same questions relate to this passage concerning the use of the niphal as applied in Genesis 18.18. Whether the nations are to use the name of Jacob in a blessing-formula

directed towards themselves or whether the association between Jacob and those blessed is to be more direct, the repetition of the promise makes it plain that Jacob, like Abraham and Isaac before him, will be the channel through which the nations are blessed.

Jacob is given the same promise about the multitude of descendants which will be his. The picture of them covering this land on which Jacob is sleeping, in every direction, "like the dust of the earth" [28.14a], is extremely graphic. Blessing is again tied to the promise of land. The story offers once more a rationale for Israel and Judah occupying the territory they do at the time of the monarchy. "The Abraham story provided the promise of which the united monarchy claimed to be the fulfillment."<sup>(34)</sup> What is, however, worth repetition is the stated reason for the blessing, "Behold, I am with you [וְהָיָה אֲנִי עִמָּךְ] and will keep you wherever you go". God's presence is the guarantee of the promise. Whilst God is with them the outcome is certain.

It is God's blessing which spills over to include Laban [Genesis 30]. [וַיְבָרֶכְנִי יְהוָה בְּגִלְדָּה] Even the diviners, who are not worshippers of Yahweh, recognize the hand of Yahweh in Laban's prosperity. Laban has grown wealthy but at the same time has become dependent upon Jacob. Jacob therefore seizes his opportunity to renegotiate the terms of his employment. The arrangement that he makes that the spotted sheep, the black lambs, and the spotted and speckled amongst the goats should be his wages leads to a further attempt on the part of Laban to deceive his nephew. Jacob, however, once again demonstrates his cunning and succeeds in outwitting his uncle. "Thus the man grew

exceedingly rich, and had large flocks, maidservants and menservants, and camels and asses [30.43]." God prospers him even in his chicanery.

It is with immense wealth that Jacob returns to his home country [Genesis 32] and it is the night before his encounter with Esau, after many years of absence, that the Yahwist describes how Jacob wrestled with an angel at the ford of the Jabbok. In spite of the fact that this story is very well-known it does not contribute a great deal to our understanding of what blessing is about. There can be little doubt that underlying the received account is an ancient tale about combat with a river spirit which has been used for his own purposes by the Yahwist. The story as we have it results in Jacob/Israel renaming the place Peniel because he has seen God "face to face". It has the aetiological purpose of explaining why the Israelites do not eat the sinew of the hip.

That in origin the subject of this tale is a river spirit rather than Yahweh himself is confirmed by the notion that this spirit must depart before daybreak. Nobody would seriously contend that Yahweh would have to break off wrestling with Jacob because of the approach of daylight. Darkness and light are both alike to him. Jacob is about to come face to face, not with God, but with Esau, the brother whom he has cheated of his father's blessing. He has sent ahead lavish gifts to prepare his arrival but Jacob is afraid. The story of his wrestling with a divine being is a part of his quest for the assurance that the God who promised to be with him is with him now.

This passage is rare in that people do not usually try to wrest power from God. In this case, however, Jacob demands a blessing [בְּרָכָה, *brachah*], something of the divine vitality vested in his opponent.



The struggle, Jacob's refusal to let his attacker go, and the urgent demand to know his name are all consistent with the idea that he wants the assurance that God is still with him, that he will be able to meet his brother without fear. To know the person's name will be to have at his disposal something of his power.

The terms of the old underlying story would require the conclusion that Jacob was given supernatural strength, the blessing he required. In terms of the Yahwist's narrative it is enough to assert that the request for a blessing is a request for the continuance of God's presence with him. To the question: "What is your name?" no answer is given. The blessing is the simple assurance that God is still with him on his journey. "The narrative confirms Jacob's stolen blessing as legitimately his."<sup>(35)</sup> He may therefore go ahead with confidence.

Jacob meets his brother Esau after years of separation. Esau receives him in a kindly manner but is worried by the size of Jacob's entourage. He does not want to accept his brother's gift. His response may mean that he has prospered well enough himself and therefore does not need Jacob's present. "Esau has obviously suffered no disadvantage through the loss of his prerogative as firstborn. He has even prospered and become powerful without it, and to such an extent that he can do without the substantial gift representing considerable wealth." <sup>(36)</sup> It may simply be that he is content to have his brother back without needing to receive any gift. Jacob certainly is moved that his brother should receive him so graciously and presses him to accept.

---

35. MITCHELL 109

36. WESTERMANN 526

That בְּרִכְתִּי should be translated "my gift" is required by the context. However, in one sense to translate it "Accept, I pray you, my *blessing*" would be dramatically more effective, for it was Isaac's blessing, intended for Esau, that Jacob acquired by deceit. It was that promise of prosperity, numerous descendants, great flocks and herds, now fulfilled, which makes it possible for Jacob to give Esau anything. By accepting the gift Esau is also reestablishing the relationship between himself and his brother and accepting his blessing, which is presumably why Jacob is so insistent."<sup>(37)</sup> Accepting the gift will carry the obligation to live peaceably with Jacob.

Just as Laban prospered because Jacob prospered, so Potiphar prospers because he employs Joseph in his household [וַיְהִי מֵאָז הַפְּקִיד אֹתוֹ בְּבֵיתוֹ וְעַל כָּל-אֲשֶׁר יַשְׁלוֹ וַיְבָרֶךְ יְהוָה אֶת-בֵּית הַמִּצְרִי בְּגִלְלָהּ יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי בְּרִכַּת יְהוָה בְּכָל-אֲשֶׁר יַשְׁלוֹ בְּבֵית וּבִשְׂדֵה]. Melvin Eugene Henderson begins his commentary on this passage by writing: "Curiously, the theme of the blessing is not prominent in the Joseph story."<sup>(38)</sup> It is an odd comment because the fact that Yahweh is "with" Joseph enabling everything he does, everything he touches to prosper, is constitutive of the whole story. Joseph has been bought as a slave to work in Potiphar's household. "The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man...[39.2] and his master saw that the LORD was with Joseph...[39.3]" Even in prison following the attempted seduction by Potiphar's wife "the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison [39.21]." "...the keeper of the prison paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph's care, because the LORD was with him;

---

37. WESTERMANN 526

38. HENDERSON 117

and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper." The repeated assertion **וַיְהִי יְהוָה אִתּוֹ** is the assurance of God's constant blessing activity which makes everything that Joseph undertakes work out well.(39) Because God is with him Joseph finds favour in the sight of his master and as a direct result Potiphar's affairs flourish. God has so blessed Joseph that every aspect of Potiphar's life thrives. Because of Yahweh's constancy [**וַיְהִי יְהוָה אִתּוֹ**] even the keeper of the prison enjoys the overflow of Yahweh's blessing on Joseph.

Joseph is an individual example of the way in which the promise to Abraham works out. He mediates blessing to those around him. "The narrator simply presupposes that the blessing can flow over from the one whom Yahweh assists to a foreign people and adherents of a foreign religion precisely because of the one whom Yahweh assists. The power inherent in the blessing is expansive; the God of the fathers is further at work in Joseph's experience of servitude in a foreign land."(40) God's providence is such that he is preparing in advance the means of survival of the children of Jacob. The prosperity which marks everything that Joseph touches because of God's presence with him will ensure that they survive and fulfil Yahweh's intention for them.

Blessing is in the Joseph cycle incredible luck or good fortune. Wherever he is put, Joseph prospers. Whenever he falls, he always lands on his feet because Yahweh is with him to protect and enable him to thrive.

---

39. VETTER Jahwes Mit-Sein 28

"Die Untersuchung lehrte die Formel vom Mit-Sein Jahwes als einen Ausdruck des stetigen, segnenden Wirkens Gottes verstehen."

40. WESTERMANN III 63



There are only two references to בָּרַךְ attributed to the Yahwist in the Book of Exodus. A harassed Pharaoh tells Moses and Aaron: "Rise up, go forth from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as you have said. Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also [וּבִרְכָתְּם גַּם-אֹתִי] [12.31 & 32]!" The climax of the story of the plagues inflicted upon the Egyptians has all the drama of a desperate man taking urgent and drastic measures to remedy a terrible situation. The tone of the request for blessing is sarcastic. Presumably it means: "Go away and allow me to prosper." The land of Egypt will be better off without these pestiferous slaves. According to the Yahwist narrative even Egypt is forced to recognise the power of the Israelite God.

The episode of the Golden Calf and Moses' indignant reaction in shattering the tablets of the Law constitute the bringing to an end of the covenant [Exodus 32]. The apostasy of the people is the direct cause of the terrible consequences that follow. The Levites rally to Moses' side וְלָחֹת עֲלֵיכֶם הַיּוֹם בִּרְכָה and three thousand people are slain. Then Moses says: "Today you have ordained yourselves for the service of the LORD, each at the cost of his son and his brother, that he may bestow a blessing upon you this day [32.29]." That the Levites have appointed themselves to a special, rather gory, service by answering Moses' call may reflect the special ordination of the Levites at a time when the Aaronic priesthood was considered to have

forfeited its position by failing to stand for Yahweh.(41) In this sense blessing is the reward of faithfulness. As a result of their action the Levites are now favoured people in the eyes of their God.

The Balaam cycle of stories is full of exegetical difficulties most of which need not detain us in a study of blessing. With the exception of 22.1, which is P's introduction, the rest of Numbers 22, 23 & 24 are divided by the commentators between the Yahwist and the Elohist. In fact, the greater part of the literature relating to the Balaam stories is concerned with the separation of the material into J and E. However, it is the fact that blessing and cursing in these stories are deemed to have an automatic effect, that they are rooted in a belief in the efficacy of the spoken word, almost magically, which indicates that we are dealing with very ancient material. Although it has already been demythologized by being brought into association with Yahweh, the basis of the story of Balak's dealings with Balaam is a belief in the "objective power and independent existence attributed to a blessing or curse".(42) Norman Snaith writes: "It is essential to recognize that both curses and blessings were regarded as having a compulsion of their own which ensured their being realized."(43) The difficulty with statements of this kind in relation to blessing and cursing is that they show little or no awareness that the concepts of

---

41. CHILDS 571

42. GRAY calls this objective power and independent existence attributed to the blessing and the curse "a special case of the belief in the power and independent existence of the spoken word."

"Such blessings or cursings," he writes, "had peculiar power when uttered by men in close communication with the deity - by a priest or magician." Numbers 327

see also WESTERMANN Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church 53

43. SNAITH 286

blessing and cursing themselves have a history and that what may be true at one stage in the development of the idea may not be true at another.

The story in Numbers 22-24 concerns a Moabite king Balak, who summons a Mesopotamian seer Balaam, a charismatic figure known for the potency of the oracles he pronounces, to curse his enemy, the people of Israel. Balaam cannot in fact do it. The story serves to make clear that such is Yahweh's purpose for his people, so much is he in control of their destiny, that he can even bring good out of evil. He transforms curse into blessing [cf also Genesis 50.20].<sup>(44)</sup> The intention of Balak in wanting the Israelites cursed is to sap the strength of a people which is numerically far stronger than Moab. The potential danger is averted by Yahweh's intervention on behalf of his people, although it is not as if this is one special act which diverts the diviner's curse. It is rather that God's presence with his people ensures their continuing state of blessedness. Yahweh's blessing laid upon the people deflects the curse like a shield deflecting an arrow.

Interestingly in asking Balaam to curse Israel Barak brings him within sight of his opponents. It is not enough to curse them from a distance [or even from his own home]. He must be brought to see those whom he is required to curse. That is certainly why Barak keeps on moving the vantage point whenever Balaam fails to fulfil his commission. Each time

---

44. WHARTON 40 & 45



Balaam is being asked to take a fresh look at the problem.(45)

### 3.2 People blessing God

The story of Abraham's dealings with Melchizedek [Genesis 14] may well be an example of what Christopher North called "originally Canaanite stories" which the Yahwist "baptized ... into the Hebrew religion".(46) On his successful return from a military excursion Abraham is met by the king of Sodom and by "Melchizedek king of Salem", the priest of God Most High, who offers him bread and wine and blesses him in the name of his god. וַיְבָרֶכְהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר בָּרוּךְ אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָם לֹא לְעֵלְיוֹן קִנָּה יְשָׁמִים וְאַרְצָא : וַיְבָרֶכְהָ אֵל עֲלִיוֹן אֲשֶׁר-מִגֵּן צָרָהּ בְּיָדָהּ [14.19-20]. The only other reference to Melchizedek in the Hebrew scriptures is Psalm 110.4. "The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."" The Psalmist is clearly concerned to make the connection between the former [mythological?] priest-king of Salem and David, the current occupant of the throne in Jerusalem. It must be remembered that Saul's capital was at Ramah and that it was a part of the genius of David that he chose Jerusalem, ideally situated as it was between Israel and Judah, to unite the two parts of his kingdom. It may well be therefore that the Yahwist told the story of the encounter between Abraham and Melchizedek to legitimate the contemporary choice of Jerusalem as the capital city and to show why the Israelite and Jewish halves of David's united kingdom should bring

---

45. NOTH 182

46. NORTH 25

their tribute there.(47) It is also significant that in the early days of the monarchy the king still has a priestly function offering intercession on behalf of the people. David and Solomon were clearly in that sense "after the order of Melchizedek".

The Genesis story shows Melchizedek offering Abraham and his men hospitality. "And he blessed him and said..." This introductory phrase may mean no more than that he greeted Abraham. Mitchell calls the following blessing-formula a "benediction of congratulation", (48) although the admiration and approval of which he writes are no more implied than relief that a threat has been removed by Abraham's military exploit. So, perhaps: "He congratulated him..."

The blessing which follows is poetic in form.(49) It cannot in this case be optative, in spite of RSV, and contra Mitchell, who is not quite consistent in his treatment of this verse.(50) It has a past reference. The evidence that God's blessing is upon Abraham is that God has given his enemies into his hand. God is "on Abraham's side..."(51) The blessing addressed to God makes it clear that it is God's victory and yet it is precisely God's past activity which is the guarantee of his ongoing presence with Abraham.

The use of the name El-Elyon, God Most High, the name of "the god of a Canaanite shrine", (52) requires some word of explanation. Abraham could presumably only accept the blessing of Melchizedek's god because

---

47. WESTERMANN Genesis I 206

48. MITCHELL 115

49. SKINNER 268-269

50. MITCHELL 115

51. MITCHELL 154

52. WESTERMANN Genesis I 204

he understood the name to mean the highest God. It would only be possible to identify Melchizedek's god with the one God Yahweh on that basis. That he pays tribute to Melchizedek means that Abraham is acknowledging allegiance to Melchizedek. That he accepts the blessing of El-Elyon makes possible the expectation that the children of Abraham will give allegiance to David and receive blessing from his lips.

When Abraham's servant blesses Yahweh, בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדָנִי [Genesis 24.27 - cf. also 24.48] he utters "an exclamation of gratitude", "a spontaneous expression of thanks"(53) to God for enabling him to complete his mission successfully. Yahweh has kept faith with his servant Abraham. He has remembered his covenant with him and has therefore brought the servant of Abraham to his destined goal. Yahweh is loyal to his word, for his covenant loyalty extends to Abraham's servant.(54)

### 3.3 People blessing people

When Rebekah leaves her homeland she is blessed by her family [Genesis 24.60]. The blessing is optative. It is a wish that she may "be the mother of thousands of ten thousands". Mitchell believes that "it may have been customary to pronounce such a benediction upon brides..."(55) There is not a great deal of evidence for that, except somewhat obliquely in the blessing of Naomi when Ruth marries Boaz

---

53. DRIVER 234

MITCHELL 155

54. cf GLUECK 71

"...וְאֵת הַדָּבָר אֲמַת are to be regarded as hendiadys, in which 'emeth has the value of an explanatory adjective."

55. MITCHELL 102



[cf. Ruth 4.14f]. However, the desired blessing is appropriate at this special time of leave-taking when the separation is so complete. Again its keynote is fertility, for there could be no worse fate than that the wife of Isaac, Abraham's son, through whom the promise was to be fulfilled, should be barren. However, as well as being numerous, Rebekah's relatives also wish for her a family which will always be strong enough to overcome its enemies. "May your descendants possess the gate of those who hate them [an echo of Genesis 22.17.]!" Rebekah's family want for her riches and secure possession of them in order to enjoy them. Rebekah herself was to be involved later in securing her husband's blessing for Jacob, her younger son.

The Yahwist describes how Rebekah and Jacob deceive Isaac into handing on the blessing to Jacob instead of Esau. וְאַבְרָכָה לְפָנֵי יְהוָה - the words are, of course, addressed to Esau [Genesis 27]. It is a story which has generated almost as many different opinions as commentators. There are those who write at length about the magical connotations of this episode when the dying, blind old man, Isaac, blesses his son Jacob.<sup>56</sup> There are those who dwell on the way in which an ancient story has been reworked so that the blessing takes place "before the LORD" [27.7].<sup>57</sup> That we are here dealing with an original saga which is retold by the Yahwist, as well as with a story which retains many of the magical elements relating to blessing, is to be accepted. The critical question must then relate to the purpose for which the Yahwist retold it. What is the context in which

---

56. GUNKEL 204

57. WESTERMANN Genesis II 438

"I think that the phrase [לְפָנֵי יְהוָה] is a subsequent addition and is intended as a balance between the narrative (Isaac blesses) and the pronouncements (Yahweh blesses)."

he uses it?

Accepting that the Yahwist is writing in the time of David and Solomon, at the height of Israel's political power, the way in which the blessing is given to Jacob rather than Esau is an attempt to explain in historical terms why the peoples of Israel and Judah are in fact politically dominant. They even have God's approval in ruling over the nations who are understood to be the descendants of Esau. The line of descent from Abraham passes through Isaac rather than Ishmael, through Jacob rather than Esau, so that the story of Isaac blessing Jacob legitimates the predominance of Israel over the nations roundabout. An ancient piece of folklore is [only slightly] recast to explain why things are so.

The story depends for its dramatic effect on factors which are to the modern mind extraordinary. "The dramatic tension comes into the narrative through the peculiar nature of the blessing procedure: the blessing can be given to one person only and once given cannot be taken back."<sup>58</sup> The automatic efficacy of a blessing once uttered has been widely proclaimed as part of the fabric of the theology of blessing on the basis of Genesis 27. It may be something that the Yahwist himself specifically wants to claim in his attempt to give a theological rationale for the preeminence of Israel over the nations. In so far as a permanently valid, irrevocable promise of blessing is bestowed by God on Abraham the claim to the rightness of the contemporary pre-eminence of Israel and Judah over the nations is substantiated, provided that the blessing is handed on irretrievably through Jacob [וְאֶבְרָהָם גַּם-בָּרוּךְ יְהִיָּה]. Jacob by this act is

---

58. WESTERMANN Genesis II 435

designated the legal heir. He cannot be criticized for robbing Esau of what was Esau's right. Inheritance is not tied to being first-born. He can be criticized for deceiving his old blind father whose intention is to bless Esau. "Jacob cannot be faulted for trying to obtain the birthright, since legally it did not belong to Esau automatically; it belonged to whomever the father chose to give it, though ordinarily he would give it to the chronological firstborn."(59) However, whereas the Yahwist lightly touches the text to make it clear that Isaac's blessing of Jacob takes place *לְפָנֵי יִהְיֶה*, the ancient story attributes to the human initiator of blessing a clear proactive rôle in it. "Without question the effectiveness of this blessing, according to the conception of our narrative, does not rest with God only but requires active giving on man's part and a special will to give it to a younger man."(60)

Some commentators take great delight in recognizing in the story ritual features which are thought to be integral to the account as we have it. Much is made of the process of identifying the one to be blessed. Great play is made of the fact that this episode is a kind of covenant-making ceremony and that it is set in the context of a shared meal. The significance of physical contact is extensively explored in the light of the fact that Jacob kisses his father. It probably is significant that the context of the blessing in Genesis 27 is leave-taking. What is manifest none the less is that "his father's blessing" "was held in antiquity to exert a determining influence upon a

---

59. MITCHELL 80-81

60. von RAD Genesis 271



person's future."(61)

The content of blessing, as in many other contexts, is the fertility of the land. Good crops are the product of a rich soil and plenty of water. The blessing includes "the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine". That in itself would be desirable. Isaac's blessing, however, goes further than assuring Jacob of more than adequate provision for the maintenance of the fabric of life. Blessing always seems to have in any case the connotation of excess. It points to the superabundance of God's provision. Still further in this instance the blessing of Jacob includes dominance. "Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down before you [27.29]." This is the Yahwist's concern that the political facts of life should be understood to be the expression of God's will. Not for the last time religious conviction is pressed into the service of the state. In defence of the Yahwist nobody amongst his contemporaries would have understood any separation between the sacred and the secular. It was as natural for him to give the theological rationale for the political situation as it was for priests to write about the regulation of the cult.

The Jacob-Laban cycle of stories ends with an account of their separation. A covenant is made between them and a meal is consumed, although the story dwells one-sidedly on Jacob's part in it all. The heart of the story is the claim by Jacob that if God had not been "on his side [הָיָה לִי]" Laban would have continued to cheat him and sent him away empty-handed - echoes of "Behold I am with you" [28.15]. Laban may well consider himself lucky that Jacob was prepared to make a treaty and undertake to respect his borders. The blessing is a

leave-taking, the parting words between Laban and his daughters and grandchildren.

The adoption by Jacob of the sons of Joseph and his Egyptian wife is portrayed as a death-bed scene [Genesis 48]. There are features of the story reminiscent of the time when Jacob deceived his father Isaac into giving him the blessing. Jacob is now old. His sight is failing and throughout the Jacob/Joseph narrative there is constant reference to the fact that Jacob is not very far from death. It is implied that the blessing of someone on the point of death is especially potent and that once given it cannot be recalled. It has the feel of a last will and testament.

When Joseph brings his sons to the old man he is required to identify them. Jacob embraces and kisses them. Joseph steers the boys so that Manasseh, the elder, is at Jacob's right hand and Ephraim, the younger, on his left. The inner logic of the story requires the belief that the blessing received from the right hand is stronger than that received from the left. Otherwise it makes no sense that Jacob crosses his hands over before laying them on the boys' heads. Nor would there be any reason for Joseph to be agitated and try to correct what the blind old man is doing. However, Jacob insists and the younger is designated as the one who will be the stronger and more influential of the two, again reflecting the time when Jacob, the younger of the twins, took precedence over his brother Esau. It is probable that Jacob's blessing of the two boys does no more than reflect the actual situation in subsequent history. The tribe of Ephraim was in fact stronger and more numerous than the tribe of Manasseh.

The laying on of hands is taken by many to be a vestige of the magical transfer of power which it is claimed underpins the story. Johannes Behm claims that "die Handauflegung bedeutet Übertragung".(62) The older commentators were clear that there was a real transfer of power and vitality. Mowinckel and others believe that physical proximity was considered necessary for blessing to be transmitted.(63) The whole occasion is about the transmission of power and authority and even of actual property [48.22].

It is in any case the nature of the God in whom one believes which guarantees the fulfilment of what is pronounced. In the end the blessing is Yahweh's. He is one who is faithful to his promise. He promised Abraham that he would be a great nation. That promise has been kept in relation to Isaac and Jacob. It will be kept in relation to Joseph and his sons. So, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh are to be very numerous and they are to keep alive the names of their forebears, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob [48.16]. They are to have God's protection. They are to be a byword of good fortune. Even their fellow Israelites will use their names in blessing others [48.20]. Such will be their prosperity.

There can be no doubt whatsoever that the so-called blessings of Jacob upon his children are an addition to the original narrative. Whilst it must be acknowledged that blessing can be uttered without the word בֵּרַךְ appearing in the context, the very content of Genesis 49.1b-27 is crafted as a prophecy of what the various tribes will become rather than specifically as blessings. In some cases

---

62. BEHM 139 see also 119-120

63. MOWINCKEL 9



characteristics of the tribal groups are picked out for comment, like the violent anger of Simeon and Levi. "Cursed be their anger..."[49.7] Hardly a blessing! There is no mention of the future priestly role of the sons of Levi. The future royal rôle of Judah is predicted. Only in the case of Joseph are true words of blessing spoken, the content of which is fertility and prosperity. His lands will be fertile because of the abundant rainfall, "the blessings of heaven above", and because of the water which springs up from the ground, "the blessings of the deep that couches beneath". He will have many offspring, "the blessings of the breasts and of the womb".(64)

The first part of 49.28 must be editorial addition to make the poem [1b-27] fit the context. The frame in which it is set would then be [49.1a] "Then Jacob called his sons" and [49.28b] "he blessed them". "Blessing each with the blessing suitable to him" is the editor linking the various prophecies concerning the future of Jacob's sons to the poem he has introduced into the text. Apart from giving instructions about his burial the blessing of his sons is Jacob's final act.

### 3.4 Summary

Blessing in the Yahwist is the promise of many descendants in order that the children of Abraham may be "a great nation" [Genesis 12.2]. They are to be "as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore" [Genesis 22.17] or "like the dust of the earth" [28.14].

---

64. The text of v.26 is odd. MT reads: "the blessings of your father have been mightier than the blessings of my progenitors, unto the desire of the everlasting hills." [SPEISER 369]

Speiser's emendation of the text produces "the blessings of grain-stalk and blossom", which has the merit of fitting with the rest of the forecast of well-being for Joseph's people.

They are to enjoy fame and a high reputation [12.2]. This the Yahwist believes to have been achieved at the time he is writing during the reigns of David and Solomon. The people of Israel are to be a source of blessing to other nations [12.3b et al] and to individuals like Abimelech, Laban, Potiphar and indeed the people of the land of Egypt who all share in the overflow of blessing surrounding God's chosen people, his elect, for blessing is characteristically superabundant.

Blessing includes the gift of the land of Canaan [12.7a], which will be fertile not by reason of the gods of the former inhabitants of the land but because Yahweh himself is the source of fertility. He will provide good soil and abundant rainfall. The earth will yield rich crops and support great flocks and herds just as God gave increase to the sheep and goats of Jacob and Laban. In order to put Canaan under their control Yahweh's blessing will include military conquest and victory in battle as in Genesis 14 [see also 24.60].

In the case of the patriarchs blessing is long life. It is received as a gift. Blessing can be specifically a present as when Jacob sends his gift to Esau in an attempt to restore the relationship between them. Accepting the gift is to accept the relationship, with the implication that they will afterwards live together in peace. Blessing is a relationship with Yahweh, a covenant which is offered on the basis of his *hesed*. Such a realisation prevents any lapse into a magical understanding of blessing. There is nothing automatic about it. The pronouncement of blessing is not *ex opere operato*. Nor is it entirely unconditional, as is often suggested. Abraham must be obedient and keep faith with Yahweh. It is Yahweh who guarantees the succession of the blessing, through Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph [Ephraim and Manasseh]. They too must keep the covenant and live in relationship

with Yahweh. The consequences of sinning are terrible, as the inhabitants of Sodom have to learn [Genesis 18]. [See also Exodus 32 - the episode with the Golden Calf.] Blessing does none the less leave an active rôle for the human initiator. It requires the participation of human beings, as when Isaac summons his son in order to bless him before he dies.

Blessing is the presence of Yahweh. He is "with Abraham" [26.24], "with Jacob" [28.15], and "with Joseph" [39.3]. The result is the blessing of increase and prosperity. Blessing is more a process than an activity. It is a corporate concept, a state of being bound up together. Blessing can be wished upon someone in greeting or in leave-taking. It can bear the force of congratulation as when Melchizedek greets Abraham after his victory over rival chieftains. It can be an expression of gratitude as when Abraham's servant blesses God for helping him to fulfill his commission.

The stories of blessing told by the Yahwist contain magical elements, some of which he does not scruple to use for his own purposes. The fact that the blessing given by Isaac to Jacob cannot be recalled gives legitimacy to the place of eminence that the tribes of Israel and Judah enjoy at the time of David. However, much that remains of magic in the story of Isaac blessing Jacob or in the Balaam cycle is recast so that it happens **לְפָנַי יְהוָה**.

The Yahwist's chief concern is indeed to proclaim that Yahweh is the God of all creation. It is his intention that his creation shall prosper [be blessed]. In order that Adam's descendants may overcome the serpent this Yahweh has chosen the Shemites to be the vehicle of blessing for all the nations. In particular Abraham is the one elected



by God, out of his love, to be the focus of God's history with his people. Yahweh has made a covenant with Abraham and promised to bless him and his heirs in the covenant. God is faithful to his covenant promises. It is he who ensures the succession of Isaac and of Jacob. Yahweh is identified with El Elyon, the most High God. There can be no other. It is this God who gives the land of Canaan to his chosen people and ensures their well-being in it. It is he who has brought David to power in Jerusalem and in so doing has made "Abraham" a great nation.

## Chapter 4

### The Theology of Blessing in Deuteronomy

#### 4.1 God blessing people

The book of Deuteronomy is set out as a speech of Moses to the whole people. It lays great stress on the continuity of relationship between Yahweh and the people with its ringing references "to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob...[1.8.]" The people have already prospered and multiplied according to God's promise to the fathers. God keeps his word [וַיְבָרֶךְ אֶתְכֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לָכֶם [1.11]] and they are now to take possession of the land of the promise. The very fact that the people has become so numerous is a source of both praise and complaint. God has kept his word and the people are "as the stars of heaven for multitude", but that very fact has made them unmanageable. Moses needs help. He needs to delegate authority to others to judge over them.

When the people of Israel turn to the north in their desert wanderings [2.1-8] to pass through the territory of the children of Esau, they are commanded to purchase food and water, "for the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands [כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בֵּרַכְךָ בְּכֹל מַעֲשֶׂה יָדְךָ [2.7]]; he knows your going through this great wilderness: these forty years the LORD your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing." This whole verse is believed by many to be an addition

to the text (1) because of its mention of "the work of your hands".(2) This expression in many places in the Hebrew Scriptures [Isaiah 65.22; Haggai 2.17; Job 1.10](3) refers to a settled agricultural community, although it can simply be translated "undertakings", "enterprises" - as the context in 2.7 requires. There is, however, no need to conclude that verse 7 is an addition or interpolation. The words "the works of your hands" are best understood as an anachronism. They date from a later settled economic environment, but that does not prevent them being an authentic part of the text from the perspective of the Deuteronomic writers. They do not have to be excised. In anachronistic form they express the idea that God has prospered the people in everything. Even in the wilderness the presence of Yahweh is the guarantee of blessing.(4) "God has been with you" [2.7b] - and the character of that presence is God's providential care - "he knows your going through this great wilderness". They have enjoyed plenty, or perhaps sufficiency, since God's provision for their needs is described in a rather understated way in the litotes - "you have lacked nothing".

Although Yahweh has made provision for the children of Esau [he has given them Mount Seir "as a possession" and hence the Israelites are to buy food from them and take nothing by force], the special relationship between Yahweh and Israel [בְּרִית יְהוָה תְּהִיָּה] [7.14]] is brought out clearly at the point when they enter the promised land. The Deuteronomic writers speak of the love of

---

1. cf MAYES 135-136

"The author has a settled rather than a nomadic people in view."

2. The Masoretic Text has the singular "of your hand".

3. DRIVER 35

4. CUNLIFFE-JONES 37



God for his people. His love and blessing bring increase in numbers and guarantee the fertility of the soil. וְאַהֲבָה וּבִרְכָה וְהִרְבָּה וַיְבָרֶךְ [7.13]. However the "down" side of the strong sense of election is expressed in the instruction to destroy utterly the many inhabitants of the land. None are to be spared.<sup>(5)</sup> The covenant that God makes with his people Israel is exclusive. The people are not to make any treaty [enter into a covenant relationship] with any of the inhabitants of the land. There must be no possibility of compromising the pure religion of Yahweh. The people must be free of any taint of the fertility religion of the Baalim. Every sign of heathen worship is to be destroyed. The covenant with Yahweh must not be marred by contact with the gods of the land. So, the people of the land must be totally eradicated.

Yahweh's covenant with the people of Israel is, however, not ultimately based on anything they do. It is based on God's faithfulness and his *hesed*. "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations..." [7.9] "This element of the covenant, Yahweh's *hesed*, is characteristic of the Deuteronomic writings."<sup>(6)</sup> In no other place in the Pentateuch is there

---

5. The herem [חֵרֶם] is commonly used for the purpose of checking idolatry. It involves the complete destruction of every living person in the place and may additionally involve the slaughter of livestock, as well as the burning of all booty. It contains the idea of everything being "devoted" (separated - set aside) as the property of God. It might also on occasion include the sowing of the cultivated land with salt to make it barren or infertile. It belongs to the area of curse, and yet it also has the flavour of holiness about it by association with the idea of "being set aside" for God, for his special purpose.

See DRIVER Deuteronomy 98-99

6. SMITH Deuteronomy 113

to be found such teaching concerning God's love for his people.(7)

However, this love is precisely covenant love. It requires the people to keep the covenant. It is for those "who love him and keep his commandments..." The reverse side of this covenant love, which in Deuteronomy 7 is given equal weight, is the abhorrence with which Yahweh deals with those who hate him [7.10]. The people is therefore exhorted to take care to keep his commandments.(8) Blessing is tied to the people's obedience. It is construed as a consequence of walking in God's ways.(9) The reward of Israel's obedience is prosperity and health.

As for the detailed content of blessing, it is all those things for which the former inhabitants of the land turned to their fertility gods. In former times the plentiful yield of the land and the material benefits which enriched their life were received by the conquered tribes, they believed, from the hands of the Baalim. In Deuteronomy they are the gift of Yahweh to his people, for he is the faithful God of Israel who keeps covenant with his people whilst they walk in his commandments.

---

7. DRIVER Deuteronomy 100

8. CUNLIFFE-JONES Deuteronomy 65

"...to cope successfully with the practical tasks of life is to have the blessing of God.

9. On the translation of אֲכֵב [ʾēkeb] in 7.12, see MAYES Deuteronomy 186

"because": a better translation than "if" [NEB]. The word ʾēkeb, which is used here is stronger than ʾim ["if"]; it is a noun meaning "consequence" or "result", and so emphasizes the connection of blessing to obedience."

WESTERMANN Blessing and Curse in the Bible and the Life of the Church spells this out in detail.

"The polarity of blessing and curse is here linked to the polarity of

The completeness of the destruction of the people of the land and of their gods is designed to underline the fact that Yahweh alone is the source of the benefits that the people enjoy. "The reference to military success [7.16] brings back the focus to the theme of the chapter as a whole. All the blessings described earlier could come to pass only after the Israelites had expelled the previous occupants of the land and possessed it for themselves."(10)

Whilst as in many other places the content of blessing is a list of material goods to be enjoyed, many commentators note that the blessings enumerated are designated by words indicating goods in their raw, untreated state, thereby emphasizing the link between blessing and natural growth.(11) Blessing is also the absence of disease. "In disease-ridden lands freedom from illness is the very condition of the enjoyment of existence."(12)

It is in Deuteronomy 11 that the tribes are faced with the stark choice between blessing and curse. "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse...the blessing, if you obey the commandment of the LORD your God...you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim." [רְאֵה אֲנִי נָתַן לְפָנֵיכֶם הַיּוֹם בְּרָכָה וּקְלָלָה... אֶת־הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמָעוּ אֶל־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם... וְנִתְּתָה אֶת־הַבְּרָכָה עַל־הָרְזִים [11.26,27,29]] The chapter begins with an exhortation to love God and to obey his commands. The Israelites are reminded of God's goodness to them in the past. Again a picture of conditional prosperity is painted. They will possess the land. If they are obedient they will be

---

deliverance and judgement." 49

10. CRAIGIE The Book of Deuteronomy 181

11. DRIVER 103 [followed by MAYES 187]

12. CUNLIFFE-JONES 65



victorious in their struggle with the people of the land. They will prosper in a country which is luxuriant and fertile. As a reminder of God's law they are to bind it upon their hearts and their foreheads and on the doorposts of their houses.[cf. also ch.6.vv. 8 & 9] Chapter 11.26-32 serves as a climactic summary of the sermon that has gone before and as an introduction to the detailed statutes and ordinances spelled out in chapter 12. Craigie identifies in chapters 11-29 a chiastic structure, which if correct makes the Book of Deuteronomy a highly stylized and self-conscious production.(13) They have a clear, sharp choice, blessing or curse. They will be blessed if they obey; they will be cursed if they do not obey and the full consequences of that choice are laid out in chapter 28. The consequence of blessing is material prosperity. The consequence of the curse is barrenness, sterility. The problem verse is 11.29. "...you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal."

Many commentators believe that these words belong in the context of a solemn renewal ceremony - an eminently reasonable conjecture in the

---

### 13. CRAIGIE 212

"The framework within which the detailed presentation of the law is set can be seen in the following outline:

- (a) The blessing and the curse in the *present* renewal of the covenant (11:26-28).
- (b) The blessing and the curse in the *future* renewal of the covenant (11:29-32).
- (c) The specific legislation (12:1-26:19).
- (d) The blessing and the curse in the *future* renewal of the covenant (27:1-26).
- (e) The blessing and the curse in the *present* renewal of the covenant (28:1-29:1).

Thus it can be seen that the specific legislation is set in a chiastic framework, stressing the importance of the blessing and curse contingent upon obedience to the legislation both in the present and in the future."

light of related texts [see Joshua 5.11-12; 8.30-35; Deuteronomy 27.11-13]. "Setting blessing on Gerizim and curse on Ebal" presupposes that the people of Israel is now in possession of the land and indeed looking from the west to the east, which puts Mount Ebal in the north and Mount Gerizim in the south. What of the ceremony that is implied? "This act was intended to document the fact that God's promise to give Israel the land has now been fulfilled and that God's blessing on the land into which he has led them is now in effect." (14)

Why then blessing on Gerizim and curse on Ebal? It is because Ebal represents the north and Gerizim the south, Ebal being on the left and Gerizim on the right. The right hand is the favoured side, the propitious quarter of heaven, and therefore desirable. (15) This does no more than correspond to the sober geographical facts. The slopes of Gerizim are fertile and the slopes of Ebal bare and barren, a situation which would be ascribed to Yahweh's blessing and curse. (16) The setting up of these two poles within a liturgical context represents the setting of limits to Yahweh's blessing which, some exegetes claim, before the Deuteronomists was thought to be unconditional and free. (17)

It is chapter 28 of Deuteronomy which dividing fairly easily into two main contrasting sections, namely vv.1-14 and vv.15-46, contains parallel passages of blessings and curses. The rest of the chapter, vv.47-57 and 58-68 is two lengthy pieces of elaboration of the curse section. The beginning of the parallel lists of blessings and curses in

---

14. WESTERMANN Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church 45

15. cf. Genesis 35.18 & Matthew 25.33 where the right hand is the favourable side.

16. MAYES 218

17. WESTERMANN 48

vv. 1 & 15, opening in each case with the word "if" [אִם], makes it clear that what follows in both circumstances is conditional. The blessings are the consequence of obedience to God's laws; the curses are the direct result of failing to do his will. "All these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if...[28.2]" The future and conditional nature of the blessings and the curses is rightly expressed in the RSV by translating the Hebrew passive participle בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה by "blessed shall you be..." rather than "blessed are you..."(18)

"All these blessings" and "all these curses" are almost described as if they have a life of their own,(19) but in fact they fall short of being personified and are simply a periphrasis for "God will give you..." or "God will visit you with all kinds of trouble". The word "blessings" is used with the sense of gift. The people of Israel knew their sons and daughters [פְּרִי-בְטֶנֶה] and their food [מִנְאָה וּמִשְׁאַרְתָּה] were gifts from God. They were sure that it was he who prospered them not only in agriculture but also in the world of commerce [בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה בְּעִיר]. They did not, however, scruple to ascribe to him also the curse, the troubles and misfortunes, which would fall on those who do not walk in his ways [וּבָאוּ עָלֶיךָ כָּל-הַקְּלָלוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וְהַשִּׁיגוּךָ].

The whole argument of Deuteronomy is summed up in 30.19. "I have set

---

18. LXX translates בָּרוּךְ in this context by εὐλογημένος, the perfect participle, whereas when God is blessed the LXX translators prefer to use εὐλογητός, a verbal adjectival form describing a state, presumably in the belief that blessing can add nothing to God. The perfect participle εὐλογημένος, however, expresses an action or the result of blessing and is therefore appropriate in referring to changeable human beings.

19. DRIVER 304-305

"The blessings, like the curses, are almost personified, and represented as pursuing their objects, like living agents."



before you life and death, blessing and curse [חַיִּים וְמוֹת, בְּרָכָה וְקָלָה] [לְפָנֶיךָ הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקָּלָה]."

#### 4.2 People blessing God

On innumerable occasions the people are reminded of their dependence upon the God who cared for them in the desert by supplying food and clothing. The land God has given them is an agricultural paradise with every kind of fruit and tree growing in profusion. It has mineral resources, copper and iron. It contains everything the heart could desire for a prosperous and comfortable life. Blessing is the possession of these wonderful gifts from God's bounty.

It is against this background that the people are told to eat their fill and to "bless the LORD your God [וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ] for the good land he has given you". This act of blessing the Lord is an act of remembrance, a reminder that they are dependent upon God for the maintenance of life itself.(20) "Take heed lest you forget the LORD..."[8.11] The fear of the Deuteronomic writer is that in well-being and comfort the people will forget their duty to walk in God's ways and obey his commandments. "In their new prosperity and satisfaction, they were always to remember the source of their blessed state."(21) And the dire consequences of forgetting God and failing to "bless" him are spelled out in considerable detail in chapter 8.v.11ff. "Because this very superabundance might become a danger to Israel, the preacher hastens on to his main admonition not to forget

---

20. CUNLIFFE-JONES 66-68

21. CRAIGIE 187

Yahweh in this profusion of blessings and in a possible satiety [...11] or even to become self-confident and arrogant [v.17]."(22) Sir George Adam Smith, following and quoting Bertholet, writes that "the verse is the proof-text for the Jewish custom of prayer at table; possibly, however, the custom is older than our passage; cp. 1 Sam.ix.13." Many Jewish writers too see Deuteronomy 8.10 as their reference-point for grace at meals.(23)

However, the commentators on chapter 8 seem to assume that everyone knows what it means "to bless the LORD" but "blessing God" cannot mean precisely the same as blessing human beings. God does not need food and clothing and the material provision which blessing involves for the human recipients of blessing. There is perhaps here a vestige of the ancient practice of offering gifts to the gods, making a sacrifice, which might well be tangible, physical presents for the deity. Indeed the injunctions in Deuteronomy 26 to take the first-fruits of the harvest in a basket and lay them before the priest are of this kind. They are offered to the Lord before they are given to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless and the widow "that they may eat within your towns and be filled [26.12]".

Yet there are two elements clearly contained within the notion of blessing Yahweh which do lead directly to the custom of saying grace before meals, namely praise and thanksgiving - praise for God's lovingkindness [his *hesed*], for he is a faithful God, and thanksgiving for the wonderful, abundant provision he has made for his people's

---

22. von RAD 73

23. cf. Louis FINKELSTEIN "The Birkat Ha-Mazon"

welfare.(24) Luther translates **וַיְבָרֶכְתָּ** by "du lobest", taking "praise" or "worship" to be the dominant layer of "blessing the LORD". There can be little doubt that many have followed that lead. That cannot, however, be the end of the discussion when in so many contexts there is a physical, material dimension alongside the words of praise addressed to God.

In fact the Israelites must go to the Lord's appointed place (25) to make their physical, material offerings, and [12.7] "there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your households, in all that you undertake, in which the LORD your God has blessed you."(26) "...in which the LORD your God has blessed you" involves an awareness that God has provided. A communal meal is envisaged, of which the keynote is joy and thanksgiving for the material goodness of the Lord.(27)

In the new settled situation in which they find themselves in their cities and towns it will be lawful to slaughter cattle for meat, as long as the blood is poured out and not eaten. They will be able to eat as much as they want "according to the blessing of the LORD your God" [**כַּבְרֶכַת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ**]. Whilst there is again a strong sense that it is

24. DRIVER 109-110

25. The centralization of worship in Jerusalem is a strong emphasis in the writings of the Deuteronomists.

26. The footnote in KITTEL suggests that **אֲשֶׁר בִּרְכָה יְהוָה** **אֱלֹהֶיךָ** should probably be deleted.

27. CRAIGIE 217-218

"These sacrifices and offerings would arise out of the bounty that would accrue to the Israelites in the promised land; thus the very possibility of bringing sacrifices and offerings would exist only in the fulfillment of God's promise, and the bringing of them would acknowledge and commemorate in an open manner the goodness of God as provider."



the Lord who provides, that what they have is his gift, in this case the phrase appears to mean that they may eat as they have opportunity. What God gives they may consume if it pleases them to do so, but the emphasis throughout the chapter is on the fact that it is Yahweh who sends this bounty and not the pagan gods of the land. The fact of the matter is that before food is consumed it is offered to the Lord. Only then is it shared one with another.

It is integral to the celebration of the Harvest Festival that offerings are brought first and foremost as a gift to God. The Deuteronomist describes three major festivals all of which were at least in origin a kind of harvest festival, the Passover being historicized particularly in terms of the people's experience of the Exodus from Egypt. In 16.1-8 the observance of the Passover is enjoined. The Passover sacrifice is to be offered "at the place which the LORD your God will choose [16.6]." Consistently throughout his writings the Deuteronomist advocates the centralisation of worship.

After Passover, the Feast of Weeks is described where the worshipper is required to bring a freewill offering in his hand.(28) He

---

28. The problem in this verse is the hapax legomenon מִסַּט [from מִסַּט]. The RSV translates "the tribute of..." but there are good reasons for translating "a sufficiency of...", i.e. a sufficient/adequate free-will offering, not because of its juxtaposition with the idea of blessing, but by comparison with the Aramaic form of the word. [With CRAIGIE in translation but preferring MAYES' reasoning.]

CRAIGIE 245 "The word *missat* [translated *sufficient*] is a *hapax legomenon*. The sense of "sufficient/adequate" is determined by the clause at the end of the verse: *according as the Lord your God shall bless you*. The sufficiency of the offering a person made was determined not by its inherent value or its size, but by its relation to the provision of God in the harvest."

MAYES 260 "tribute: the word *missat* is of obscure origin. It is found

is to give according to the measure of prosperity granted to him by Yahweh [16.10]. The question of how much should be brought is determined by how much each has received from God's bounty.(29) It is to be a time of rejoicing.

The Feast of Booths is also to be a celebration of God's good gifts. The people are to rejoice because of the prosperity they enjoy at the hand of their God. It is an occasion to wonder at the way in which Yahweh has multiplied the produce of the land and made their fields and vineyards fertile. In 16.16-17 in summary form the people are exhorted to appear before the Lord three times a year in the centrally appointed place, and "every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which he has given you [16.17]." The verse is a fitting climax to the description of the feasts [אִישׁ כַּמְחַנֵּת יָדוֹ כְּבִרְכַּת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָךְ]. It is "a fine statement of the meaning of a freewill offering..."(30)

#### 4.3 People blessing people

The Book of Deuteronomy provides some evidence of the struggle that took place over the years between the sons of Aaron and the sons of Levi with regard to the priesthood. There is strong reason to believe

---

only here in the Old Testament, but occurs in Aramaic with the sense of "sufficiency". The translation "tribute" is apparently based on a [questionable] connection with the word *mas*, "forced service". The word may be a corruption of *k<sup>e</sup>matt<sup>e</sup>nat*, which appears in v.17 [with *yādô* translated "as he is able"], though there is no support in the versions for this. As it stands the translation is "the sufficiency of the freewill offering", i.e. as much as possible in relation to the total harvest."

29. DRIVER 196

30. CUNLIFFE-JONES 103

that Deuteronomy 10.6-9 is a late intrusion into the text but it includes a reference to the death of Aaron as well as the accession of Eleazer, his son, to take his place, marking at the least the beginning of an hereditary priesthood. Then somewhat at odds with that, in verse 8, we read: "At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi..." "At that time..." being presumably "at that stage in their wanderings..." The reason for the separation of the tribe of Levi is said to be threefold. (1) They are to carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord. (2) They are to stand before the Lord to minister to him and (3) they are to bless in his name, which they do "to this day". The Deuteronomist claims that these are the facts concerning the Levites in his own time. He gives further details in chapter 18.1-8. All of this information is at odds with the data provided by the Priestly writers, who make exclusive claims for the sons of Aaron [cf. Leviticus 9.22 & Numbers 6.22]. "Here all Levites are priests and their inheritance is not land, but their share in the religious offerings." (31) It should be noted also that the so-called blessing of Jacob in Genesis 49.5-7, with its reference to Simeon and Levi and their hot-blooded anger does not indicate any apparent priestly functions either. None the less, it would appear that to the Deuteronomist Levite and priest are synonymous, although this is not universally accepted to be the case. (32)

These verses contain no internal evidence concerning the content of blessing. They do, however, indicate that it is regarded as a priestly

---

31. CUNLIFFE-JONES 75

See also von RAD 80

"They do not live by cultivating the land and have no landed property at all, but live, so to speak, from Yahweh's table."

cf. also CRAIGIE 201

32. see R. ABBA in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Vol 3 882 Article: "Priests and Levites"



function, a privilege exercised by the Levitical priests – which does not, of course, necessarily mean that only the priests were authorized to bless. [cf. 2 Samuel 6.18 & 1 Kings 8.14 & 55] In any case the blessing is Yahweh's. לְיִשְׂרָאֵל וּלְבָרָךְ בְּשֵׁמוֹ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה. It is done "in his name", that is, it is his power which is at work and the act of blessing is performed with his authority. Whatever is said about one person blessing another, it is always Yahweh's blessing. It is only done by permission.

The right to bless is also significantly in this context linked with the service which is offered to Yahweh in making the necessary preparations for worship [LXX λειτουργεῖν καὶ ἐπεύχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ].(33)

The fact of the matter is that the Levite has no land and is dependent upon the material offering brought to the sanctuary for God. It is brought to be shared in a fellowship meal but it also represents the sustenance of the Levites. The Deuteronomist specifies that a tithe of the produce is to be consumed in the place of the Lord's choosing, namely Jerusalem. The people are to bring the tithe to the appointed place as a part of the process of the centralisation of worship. "The emphasis given to the tithe in these verses, in contrast to the more precise legislation contained in Num.18:21-32 and Lev.27:30-33, rests

---

33. LXX ἐπεύχεσθαι [to pray] is found also in 1 Chronicles 23.12. These two references are parallels and treated by many commentators as one. This variant translation of לָבַד is part of the solid evidence that these verses are a late interpolation into the text of Deuteronomy. "to pray in his name" in 1 Chronicles 23.13 is, however, a function of the sons of Aaron. In that context "to this day" becomes "for ever", further evidence of the exclusive claims polemically made in the post-exilic period for the Aaronic priesthood.

principally on the joyful meal of fellowship eaten by the whole family in the presence of God [14.26] and the provision made for the Levites [14.27: see also 12:12]."(34) An exception is, however, made if the worshipper lives too far away from the central sanctuary to make the pilgrimage to the place a practical proposition. "And if the way is too long for you, so that you are not able to bring the tithe, when the LORD your God blesses you, because the place is too far from you, which the LORD your God chooses to set his name there, then you shall turn it into money...[14.24-25]" Those who live at a distance are given the option of buying food on arrival and then having their family fellowship meal. There are those who believe that this exception is not just because of distance but because precisely in those years when God has been particularly generous and blessed their crops abundantly the tenth would be difficult to transport.(35) George Adam Smith, however, raises the question - but offers no answer - as to whether the words "when the LORD your God blesses you" are a qualification of the tithe, indicating that the tithe was only to be paid in the good years and not in the bad, that the tenth would be withheld when the crops failed. Such an interpretation would strain the context unbearably, for even in the times of hardship the tithe would still be needed, even more needed, for the provision to be made for the Levite, the sojourner, the widow and the fatherless. Indeed it is this latter situation which is addressed in 14.29.

The Levite, the sojourner, and those in special situations of

---

34. CRAIGIE 233

35. DRIVER 167

"The difficulty is likely to be greater, when Jehovah's blessing increases the productiveness of the soil, and augments in consequence the bulk of the tithe."

deprivation are dependent upon the tithe. Gerhard von Rad thinks that the provision made in 14.29 is intended to prevent the impoverishment of the country priests who had lost their livelihood through the centralisation of worship. That the tithe was to be stored every third year for local consumption supports such a contention.<sup>(36)</sup> But tithing was an established institution long before the Deuteronomic revival and consequent focussing of worship on Jerusalem, and it had always involved the setting aside of a portion for the landless Levite and the poor. It is hard to believe that a triennial supply would suffice for their needs in the local areas away from the centre. Further, concern for the poor and the provision of the tithe for their needs amounts to a condition to be fulfilled in order to secure the Lord's blessing. It is an obligation laid upon the people if they themselves are to prosper. "Such devotion of the tithe to the poor is a condition of the increase of the crop from which it is made."<sup>(37)</sup> In accepting this commitment the health of the community would be maintained and the people would continue to experience, the blessing of God, which is the source of their prosperity. The religious obligation to share Yahweh's bountiful provision with the Levite and with the poor will ensure that God will prosper the harvest next year. "...and the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled; לְמַעַן יְבָרְכֶה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ.

There is no need for anyone to be poor in a nation which is blessed by Yahweh [15.4]. Therefore it is strictly laid down [15.1-12] that no creditor shall exact the debt owed by a fellow Israelite, although the

---

36. von RAD 103

37. SMITH 196



foreigner receives no such consideration. Debts are to be remitted in the seventh year. The purpose of this release would appear to be an attempt to deal with poverty within the nation. Although there need not be any poor in the midst of plenty, the fact is that there are. God's plentiful provision for the people is adequate for the needs of everybody "if only you will obey the voice of the LORD your God...[15.5a]" Being blessed by Yahweh brings responsibility for one another within the covenant people. Indeed future blessing depends on care being shown for the needy.(38) Likewise the reference to the flourishing of external trade is tied to the spiritual well-being of the nation. "The prosperity in external affairs described in v.6b would be a result of the blessing of God, but God's blessing would be contingent upon the inner health of the nation to which the requirements stated in this chapter are directed."(39)

It is indeed the sense of being bound together in solidarity with each other, one people, one nation, which underlies the need for a list of regulations [which the central chapters of Deuteronomy supply in elaborate detail] to reinforce their community identity. It is this sense of belonging to one another which makes the legislation regarding the lending of money on interest so important [23.20]. "The prohibition against taking interest from a fellow-countryman [cf. Lev.25.35ff.], actually known amongst other nations too, arose from the consciousness of a blood-brotherhood which was still alive amongst

---

38. CRAIGIE 237

See also von RAD's comment on 15.11. 106

39. CRAIGIE 237

early people."(40) Since loans are not normally needed except at a time of crisis, to exact interest from a member of the cultic community would be inappropriate, since the loan was meant to alleviate difficulty and the requirement of interest would be likely to increase the borrower's difficulties rather than diminish them. "The man wealthy enough to make a loan would be wealthy only because of the gracious provision of God; if, then, he lent something on interest [money, food] to a fellow in crisis, he would be abusing God's provision. He should lend freely, without interest, reflecting thereby his own thankfulness to God and receiving the continued blessing of God."(41) Those who lend will prosper if they treat their needy brothers and sisters generously. The mutual benefit derived from this attitude towards the time of difficulty demonstrates the community dimension of blessing. Borrower and lender are bound together in it. The blessing [well-being] of the one is tied to the other.(42)

The restoration of garments taken in pledge [24.10-13], and the provision for those in need [24.17-22] is of a piece with the Deuteronomist's attitude to moneylending. When a pledge is sought as collateral for a loan the lender is enjoined to wait outside the house of the borrower so that he may select in privacy what is to be offered as security for the money borrowed. The borrower's dignity is thereby preserved, for he is not to be demeaned by the lender looking through his possessions and making his own choice. Further, if the borrower is obliged - because he possesses nothing else of sufficient value to secure the loan - to hand over as a pledge the heavy outer

---

40. NOTH 148

41. CRAIGIE 302-303

42. For a developed treatment of the "community" of blessing [and of curse] see SCHARBERT Solidarität in Segen und Fluch

garment which would be his source of warmth during the cold of the night, then the lender is required to restore the cloak before nightfall "that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you [וַיְבָרֶכְךָ]".

Such a blessing contains a strong element of thanksgiving but there is more to it than that. "The meaning of this instruction, by being turned into an exhortation, has been twisted from a humanitarian rule into a theological one. The gratitude of the man who has been treated with consideration will bring blessing on the man who was considerate to him."(43) The theological focus of blessing is maintained by the addition of the words: "and it shall be righteousness to you before the LORD your God [24.13b]." The way in which the Israelite treats his neighbour is indicative of the state of his relationship with Yahweh.

Likewise in his treatment of the stranger, the orphan and the widow, the farmer is enjoined not to strip his fields and olive groves but to leave enough for the provision of the needs of those without crops of their own [24.17-22]. In this context too the dignity and self-respect of those in need is protected. They do not have to beg or wait for a hand-out. They have the possibility of working in their restricted way to gather their own harvest by gleaning. "And the farmers, who had allowed some produce to remain, were not simply being charitable to those less fortunate than themselves; they were expressing their gratitude to God, who had brought them out of slavery in Egypt and



given to them a land of their own."(44) Gratitude for God's generosity towards them is the motivation of the Israelite's care for those without land. "At the centre of Israel's life is the experience of being dealt generously with by the living God."(45) The solidarity of the community ensures that no one is left without food, for true prosperity received as God's gift is bound up with the treatment of the poor. Provision is made by leaving a part of the crop for the needy לַמֵּצֵא? יְהוָה אֶלֶּהֶּיָּהּ . Everyone prospers when the needy are catered for with dignity.

The tail-piece of Deuteronomy in chapter 33 is the so-called Blessing of Moses. "This is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death [33.1]." This verse can only be editorial comment. It is a summary of all that follows and the blessings themselves probably describe in future terms the relative importance of the tribes at the time of the editor. There is a great deal of specialist literature relating to the Blessing of Moses. This is not the place to pursue all the issues raised by this material but the following comments are, however, directly relevant to an understanding of blessing.

"The blessing of Moses, the man of God..." there is no suggestion that the source of blessing is in fact any other than God himself, for Moses is going to die and the promises contained in the blessing refer to the future when in the absence of Moses the tribes will experience, arguably even more acutely, their dependence on the presence of God

---

44. CRAIGIE 311

45. CUNLIFFE-JONES 139

with them.(46) The whole nation stands at the threshold of the promised land. Only Gad seems to be already in possession of his territory but will none the less take a significant rôle in the coming invasion.

On the threshold of Canaan blessing has a very strong military flavour. The blessing of Judah is a call for Yahweh's support in the forthcoming fighting. The blessing of Levi includes protection from his adversaries. Benjamin is to be kept safe in battle and the lengthy blessing of Joseph compares him to a bull whose horns will drive the peoples in front of them. The blessing of Gad guarantees him "a commander's portion [33.21]" of the spoil when the fighting is over.

Blessing is also the assurance of prosperity and of abundance. The blessing of Joseph promises "the best gifts of the earth and its fulness [33.16]". Zebulon and Issachar will reap the harvest of the sea [33.19]. Asher's territory will be good olive growing country, an idea suggested by 33.24 "let him dip his foot in oil". The blessings of Moses clearly relate to where the settled tribes are already living. They are indicators of the relative importance of one to another. Levi is given the special priestly function. The dwindling importance of Reuben is demonstrated by the fact that he is offered little more than survival.

In uttering these blessings as his parting speech to the tribes just before his death, Moses acts as the father of the whole people. In form Deuteronomy 33 parallels Genesis 49 in which Jacob blesses his sons. The blessing of a dying person appears to be particularly significant. It expresses the arrangements that the dying

---

46. CRAIGIE 394

leader/patriarch would like to make for those in his charge. It is almost a last will and testament and, because they are last wishes, are likely to be heeded with especial care. They may therefore for this reason in some way contribute to their own fulfilment. It may be this factor which leads to the belief that the blessing of someone on the point of death is especially potent.

#### 4.4 Summary

What does the Deuteronomist's understanding of the concept of blessing contribute to an understanding of the nature of God?

First and foremost blessing comes from God. Human beings may bless Yahweh by offering praise and worship. The act of blessing is in any case a reminder of the source of the good things they enjoy. They may bless him by bringing gifts in thanksgiving for the bounty he has showered upon them. These will subsequently be used for the sustenance of those in need. The practice of bringing physical, material gifts to God may not therefore be such a crude and mindless act as it is often portrayed. They may bless each other but it is always in the name of Yahweh and not in their own.

Blessing is basically a community concept. The people are bound together in blessing, so that when one flourishes everybody prospers. The Deuteronomic laws which make provision for the Levite, the widow and the fatherless, the poor and the debtor, are evidence of their solidarity in blessing.

Blessing is the increase of the population "as the stars of heaven for multitude". It includes the gift of the land of Canaan. Blessing is God's



presence with them [cf. "God has been with you" 2.7b], even in the wilderness where they lacked nothing. God has prospered everything Israel has done.

Blessing is military conquest, for Yahweh is with them as they make inroads into the land of promise. Blessing is the guarantee of the increase of their crops and herds but it is conditional upon the people's obedience. "Because blessing is tied to the people's obedience, the curse henceforth stands side by side with blessing as a possibility."<sup>(47)</sup> Blessing is the outcome of what Yahweh requires of the people. They are blessed "by keeping all his statutes and his commandments [6.2]".

God is above all the God of Israel. Esau has been given by Yahweh his territory in Seir but there is no doubt about the preeminence of Israel. God loves his people. He has entered into a special covenant relationship with them because of his *hesed* [7.9]. This covenant is renewed in the cult. Yahweh has promised increase in numbers and he has kept his word. He has provided for their needs in the wilderness. He has caused them to prosper in everything they have done and wherever they have gone. He is not a distant God. He ensures their victory in the battles for the land which he has promised. He is, however, one whose demands are to be taken seriously. When he requires the total destruction of the peoples of the land of Canaan, his command must be obeyed, for he will not brook any rival. The people must know that their well-being in the land is the result of Yahweh's providential care and has nothing to do with the fertility gods of the former inhabitants of the land.

In the teaching of Deuteronomy God is a God who wants to bless but who does not hesitate to put the curse into effect. The people themselves must accept the consequences of disobedience. There is no doubt about the seriousness of the choice they have to make. Only if they are obedient will they continue to be blessed. "You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment, and the statutes, and the ordinances, which I command you this day [7.11]." The completeness of their blessing consists in their being set apart for God, a holy people.

## Chapter 5

### The Theology of Blessing in the Priestly Writers

#### 5.1 God blessing people

If the theology of the Yahwist operates under the programmatic text of Genesis 12.1-3, then the Priestly Writers operate under the banner of Genesis 1.28. "And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." [וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם] אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וּכְבֹּשׁוּהָ וּרְדוּ בָּהָּ [בְּדֹגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל-חַיָּה הָרֹמֶשֶׁת עַל-הָאָרֶץ] If the content of blessing is to be found in context, then in the Priestly account of creation there can be no doubt whatsoever that the primary meaning of blessing is reproductive power. Genesis 1.22 proclaims clearly that it lies within every living creature to reproduce itself. "And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth"." This blessing has been built in by God into the very fabric of his creation. It is not dependent upon obedience to God. It is an ordinance of creation.(1)

Genesis 1.28 contains the same blessing for humankind as a part of

---

1. WESTERMANN Genesis I 140



the living world.(2) However, as well as filling the earth, human beings are to subdue it too and have dominion over all other living creatures. As far as they are concerned the blessing is more than the gift of fertility. It is also expressed in the five verbs which fill out its content. They are told: "be fruitful", "multiply", "fill the earth", "subdue it" and "have dominion". These are not commands to be obeyed forthwith. They, writes Westermann, "express permission".(3) The blessing is an endowment and, as such, can never run out.

From the stand-point of the Priestly Writers - working either during or shortly after the Exile in Babylon - this understanding of blessing furnishes encouragement to those in a strange land, or only newly arrived in their homeland, whose experience has raised acute questions about whether their God is still with them. It asks them to believe that God's decree guarantees their prosperity. "This proclamation is strikingly appropriate to a people who are homeless and rootless, alienated from land and traditions, an affirmation that their God is still in charge and therefore their destiny is still well-being and dominance."(4) Walter Brueggemann,(5) doing for the Priestly Writers what H.W. Wolff did for the Yahwist, the Elohist and the Deuteronomic writers, identifies the declaration of blessing in Genesis 1.28 as the focus for understanding the kerygma of the Priestly tradition. Like von Rad and Westermann, Brueggemann calls the five verbs of blessing "not so much commands as authorizations by

---

2. WESTERMANN Genesis I 88

"P distinguishes between animate and inanimate creatures. The animate creatures are blessed by God...and this is primarily the power of fertility given to humans and beasts."

3. WESTERMANN Genesis I 138

4. BRUEGGEMANN ZAW 84 1974 401

5. Ibid

which the people are empowered to believe and act toward the future".(6) He believes that the mythical symbol of chaos corresponds to the historical experience of the Exile and that the blessing of God, creating out of chaos, is the guarantee that God is always with them for good. "Delighting in the creation, God will neither abandon it nor withdraw its permit to freedom."(7)

In Genesis 1 the blessing of creation signifies God's intention that it shall thrive. It is the backcloth against which specific blessings, gifts and experiences are received. In other contexts blessing may take a particular shape, but for the Priestly Writers these occasions are specific instances of that which is built into the creative process itself. That life is blessed is a statement of faith that life is not nasty and brutish and that God is involved in it all. For example, "...there is no suggestion in this context that child-bearing as such is a punishment for sin; procreation belongs to the world which God saw to be "very good".(8) Blessing is the power of fertility and there can be no doubt that "the verb "to bless" is used in its fundamental meaning in Gen.1.22."(9)

What then does it mean to talk of blessing the seventh day [וַיְבָרֶךְ] [cf. also Exodus 20.11]? What has this to do with fertility? Skinner claims that Genesis 2.3 answers the question: "Why is no work done on the Sabbath?"(10) That it should be hallowed or sanctified [וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ] makes the day different from the

---

6. Ibid

7. BRUEGGEMANN Genesis 37

8. RICHARDSON 57

9. WESTERMANN Genesis I 140

10. SKINNER 35

others.(11) Yet the seventh day is part of the cycle of the week. Although it is different from the other six days it is integral to the well-being of humankind. "Thus at creation God prepared what will benefit man in this life, what in fact will be necessary for him..."(12) Skinner writes: "A blessing is the effective utterance of a good wish; applied to things it means their endowment with permanently beneficial qualities."(13) Whilst it is difficult to see the seventh day as "a thing", the underlying notion, as expressed by Skinner, is indisputably sound. The same principle is at work here as that found in Genesis 1.26 and 1.28. Blessing involves the idea of thriving, prosperity, well-being. It only makes sense in relation to the seventh day when the "thing" blessed has some special reference to and importance for the society of human beings at large. "The blessing gives the day, which is a day of rest, the power to stimulate, animate, enrich and give fullness to life. It is not the day in itself that is blessed, but rather the day in its significance for the community."(14) The Sabbath is a day of rest and offered as God's gift for the upbuilding of his people. It is intended to create the conditions in which they can flourish and grow.

The inclusion of the Sabbath, the day of rest, within the week, is also to be seen as a foreshadowing of the end of creation. The goal of all

---

11. Westermann Genesis I 171

12. von RAD Genesis 60

13. SKINNER 38

He assumes a background of blessing [and curse] where the spoken word has power within it, but in the period of the Exile and following, it is certain that the inherent power of the word was not understood in a crude magical sense and it remains to be established in what sense, if any, objects can be blessed.

14. WESTERMANN Genesis I 172



striving is the rest of the seventh day.(15) What in the Book of Genesis is expressed protologically is often best understood eschatologically. "...the keeping of the sabbath, in heaven and on earth, is a foretaste and anticipation of how the creation will be when God's way is fully established."(16) In the meantime, the day of rest is experienced as upbuilding and conducive to growth. The beneficial quality of rest is God's gift to humankind.

The Priestly narrative, interrupted at Genesis 2.3., continues at 5.1. with the declaration of the generations of Adam [זֶה סֵפֶר תּוֹלְדֹת]. A discussion of whether the Book of the Generations was an actual list [von Rad] or not [Eissfeldt] need not detain us here. The opening statement of 5.1. demands to be understood in the singular. It is the genealogy of Adam alone that is to be listed. The second half of verse 1, however, and the whole of verse 2 require a corporate interpretation. "Man" clearly includes "male and female" in their complementarity, and the blessing in this genealogical context must be understood in terms of their capacity for reproducing themselves.

---

15. cf. amongst modern writers of Systematic Theology, Jürgen MOLTSMANN in God in Creation SCM Press, London 1985. 6

"The sabbath is the prefiguration of the world to come. So when we present creation in the light of its future - 'the glory of God', 'existence as home' and the general 'sympathy of all things' - then we are developing a *sabbath doctrine of creation*. What this means, factually and practically, is the aspect and prospect of creation which is perceived on the sabbath, and only then. The sabbath is the true hallmark of every biblical - every Jewish and also every Christian - doctrine of creation. The completion of creation through the peace of the sabbath distinguishes the view of the world as creation from the view of the world as nature; for nature is unremittingly fruitful and, though it has seasons and rhythms, knows no sabbath. It is the sabbath which blesses, sanctifies and reveals the world as God's creation."

16. BRUEGGEMANN Genesis 36

Blessing, the ability to hand on the life which has been given by God to humankind, is a corporate idea. It would make no sense to talk of blessing being jealously guarded for or by one person.

The elements included in Genesis 1.27-28 are repeated in 5.1-2. The human race is made in the likeness of God. They are created male and female and they are blessed [וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם וַיִּקְרָא] [אֶת-שְׁמֵם אָדָם בְּיוֹם הַבְּרָאָה]. And once again it is their power of self-reproduction which fills out the content of the blessing. "Human sexuality is part of the blessing of creation." (17) However, as well as the elements of blessing identified in Genesis 1.27-28, a further concept is added to the already rich diversity of blessing, i.e. the giving of a name [5.2].

It is an addition that Westermann claims must be significant. "The naming of this creature by God here and not in 1:26-31 is deliberate. The name of the individual arises out of the name of the species, human, as the genealogy extends into history. P is saying at this point that the name of the species, human, is the name bestowed by the creator. The name preserves within it what God wanted a human being to be. The history of humankind from its creation to its end is enclosed within this name." (18) Such a statement is, however, incomplete, for it does not spell out what it means to be human. The content of the name "human" can only be understood in terms of the preceding elements, namely that human beings are created in the image of God, that the wholeness of humanity embraces male and female and that they are blessed. God's will is that they should thrive, prosper and multiply. It

---

17. IRENE NOWELL *Concilium* 178 1985 5

18. WESTERMANN *Genesis* I 356

is his intention that they should be community beings. To be given the name "human" as a race is to be defined in relation to all other living creatures and to be given an individual name, Adam, is to be defined in relation to other human beings with other names. "To be blessed is to be named, to be given not only life but identity," writes Irene Nowell.<sup>(19)</sup> To possess an identity is to be defined in relationship to other individuals and to the group as a whole, for blessing is an expression of solidarity with others, who share with us the characteristics of human nature.

The blessing of 1.28 is restated by the Priestly Writers in 9.1 and 9.7. In spite of human disobedience with its dreadful consequences in the Flood and in the Babylonian Exile, God's purpose remains steadfast. He reaffirms his intention to create order out of a constantly threatening chaos. That human beings are in the image of God is reaffirmed in 9.6. The content of the blessing in 9.1 is declared to be that Noah and his sons shall be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The Septuagint text adds καὶ κατακυριεύσατε αὐτῆς [and have dominion over it], presumably harmonising 9.1 with 1.28 and translating the Hebrew וְכָבַדָּהָּ. Nevertheless, although the Massoretic text does not include specific mention of having dominion in 9.1, human rule over the other living creatures is expressed by 9.2-6. In fact, this dominion now includes their dread of contact with the human race and in their availability to men and women for food. The prescriptions concerning the spilling of blood [9.4-6] express a high view of the sanctity of life and contain a form of *lex talionis*. The repetition of the blessing in 9.7

---

19. IRENE NOWELL Concilium 178 1985



requires  $\text{וַיִּבְרַח}$  [and subdue] instead of  $\text{וַיִּבְרַח}$  [and multiply].(20)

The interesting development in chapter 9 is the juxtaposition of covenant alongside blessing. There have been commentators who have insisted on dividing 9.1-17 into two separate passages, 1-7 and 8-17. Westermann has shown the parallelism of structure of the two sections which implies a deliberate intention and purpose in putting them side by side. Covenant and blessing are here intimately related. Westermann argues that the starting-point in understanding these verses is not to ask what the Priestly Writers mean by covenant in other places and then to apply the findings to this passage. The offer of  $\text{בְּרִית}$  [covenant] here is an attempt to give a theological explanation why God has reaffirmed the blessing after the Flood. Blessing is being declared to be the permanent intention of God for the human race.

Characteristically in Genesis 17 the promise to Abraham, to Sarah, to the child to be born and to Ishmael concerns multiplicity of descendants and not yet the gift of the land, except coincidentally as providing a context for numerous progeny.(21) God tells Abram that he will multiply him exceedingly and that he will give him a son by Sarah. She is to be the "mother of nations". The promise will be carried out through her son and through his descendants. But Ishmael is also blessed. [Some versions of LXX regard it as having happened already -  $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\eta\alpha\alpha$ , MT  $\text{וַיִּבְרַח}$  - considering it to be a prophetic perfect.] He too will be a great nation and have numerous descendants but the covenant is to be with Isaac and his descendants and not with

---

20. WESTERMANN I 460 et al.

21. COATES Genesis 134

Ishmael. "Throughout P. the promise does not simply crop up at incidental times. It is thematic and is carefully placed to guide the narrative."(22)

The content of the blessing appears to be identical for Isaac and Ishmael. They will both father nations, but whereas the Yahwist links the promise of land to the promise of descendants [Genesis 15.18-21], in the theology of the Priestly Writers the covenant with Isaac and his descendants makes his situation different from that of Ishmael. It is the assurance of God's presence which is so vital to their religious survival in Exile. "It is the covenant which offers to Israel the gift of hope, the reality of identity, the possibility of belonging, the certitude of vocation."(23) The covenant is with Isaac and his descendants and not with Ishmael. They both receive God's blessing of fruitfulness, but one is offered a covenant relationship and the other is not. "From this contrast," writes von Rad, "it becomes clear that the covenant granted by God guarantees something quite different from national greatness."(24)

In Genesis 17, as in 5.2, naming has an important place. Abram becomes Abraham. Sarai becomes Sarah and explanations of the significance of the names of Abraham's sons are accounted for by reference to his dealings with God.(25) Although naming and changing

---

22. BRUEGGEMANN 153

see 1.22,28; 9.1,7; 28.3; 35.11; 47.27b; 28.4; Exodus 1.7.

23. BRUEGGEMANN 154

24. von RAD 198

25. אֲבִרָם = exalted father, whereas אֲבִרָהָם is suggested by joining אֲבִי with הָמוֹן [a multitude], making as in RSV "the father of a multitude of nations".

שָׂרַי becomes שָׂרָה [princess].

שָׂרַי is thought to be an archaic form of שָׂרָה from either the root

names is not found solely in the Priestly Writers [see also Genesis 32.29 in the Yahwist] it is a recurring motif which is indicative of a significant event or encounter through which important change or development is signalled.

Isaac's prayer in Genesis 28.3-4 contains the Priestly writers special way of referring to God [אֱלֹהֵי שְׁרָי] as well as the wish for many descendants and possession of the promised land for Jacob as Abraham's true successor [וַיִּתֵּן-לָהּ אֶת-בְּרִכַּת אֲבִרְהָם]. Even a cursory glance at this point in the Genesis narrative shows that Genesis 27.46-28.9 can in no way be the continuation of the Yahwist account of Rebekah and Jacob deceiving Isaac in Genesis 27.1-45. The inconsistencies involved in accepting the two passages as consecutive are too great. The Jacob who in 27.1-45 flees in danger of his life is in 27.46-28.9 dismissed cordially as an obedient son. He goes off to Paddan-aram in search of a wife. The reference to the father's blessing in 28.1 is the Priestly editorial join. וַיִּקְרָא יִצְחָק אֶל-יַעֲקֹב. Genesis 27.46 should then be considered the sequel to chapter 26.34-35, where we are told of the family problems caused by Esau taking Hittite wives. So, in 28.1 Isaac summons Jacob to tell him not to marry "one of the Canaanite women". He is to go and seek a wife from his own religious and cultural background. Jacob according to the tradition of the Priestly Writers is obedient to his parents' wishes.

---

שָׁרָה [to rule, govern] or from שָׁרָה [to strive, contend] i.e. in the latter case the same root as Israel.

The meaning of שָׁמַעְתִּיךָ is suggested by שָׁמַעְתִּיךָ [I have heard you] in 17.20.

The context also offers an explanation of יִצְחָק. Abraham laughed [17.17] [from יִצְחָק] in the face of the apparent absurdity of the promise that he would be father of many people.



Remembering the situation of the returning exiles after the fall of Babylon, it is not difficult to understand why the Priestly Writers made use of this particular motif. In their own time they were concerned with preserving their community in the face of the possibility of their absorption by the surrounding peoples. "Thus," writes von Rad, "P here speaks to his own time, regulating and showing the way." (26) Jacob looks for a suitable wife within the circle of his own family. (27)

Apart from the Priestly Writers' account of the blessing of Jacob Genesis 35.9-13,15 is almost everything that they have to say about him and even this duplicates much that has already been told in JE. It contains the writers' version of the naming of the place as Beth-el, (28) [cf. Genesis 28.10-22] and the changing of Jacob's name to Israel [cf. Genesis 32]. The repetition of the story of Beth-el should be understood as a sign of the convergence of the traditions emphasizing the importance of this particular sanctuary. It is, however, curious in the light of the elaborate Priestly "explanations" of the names of Abraham, Sarah, Ishmael and Isaac in Genesis 17 that no explanation of Jacob's new name is given, unless it is accepted that they are conscious of the one already given in the JE source. The fact that his new name is explicitly mentioned therefore must have a special theological significance, indicative of the specific direction of God's promise. The covenant promise is to be continued through Jacob/Israel.

---

26. von RAD Genesis 277

27. see also BRUEGGEMANN Genesis 236

28. LXX adds ἐν Βουθῶν harmonising with Genesis 28.19.

The blessing in 35.9 has the quality of a greeting.<sup>(29)</sup> The Priestly understanding of blessing is once more reinforced in terms of fertility. "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you. The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you..." Characteristically in the Priestly strand it is El Shaddai who is the source of blessing. There is again a link between blessing and the giving of a name, and between blessing and covenant promise. God will give the land.

The Priestly version of Jacob's death-bed scene begins at Genesis 47.28 and continues in 48.3-7 with the brief account of the adoption of Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. There is no reference to the manner of adoption. It appears to take place by formal proclamation, and although there is no specific mention, there would undoubtedly be other witnesses present to verify the fact that Jacob wished Joseph's sons to be regarded as equal to Joseph's brothers. The adoption of the two boys must reflect the acknowledged status of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh in the period of the Judges.

Nothing new is here added to our understanding of blessing. The blessing is programmatically restated. Reference is again made to God's appearance to Jacob at Luz/Bethel [see Genesis 35.11 & 12]. The content of the blessing is once more the assurance of numerous progeny and to that there is added the promise of the land. Characteristically the Priestly writers are concerned with the line of continuity. Jacob was the bearer of blessing and bearer of the

---

29. The addition of "again" [וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶל-יַעֲקֹב עוֹד] is clearly an editorial addition since no previous appearance to Jacob has been

promise after Abraham and Isaac. The death-bed preparations of Jacob are equally concerned with who the recipients of the blessing and the promise will be after him.

Brief reference should be made to Leviticus 25.21: "I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year [בִּשְׁנָה לְכֶם אֶת-בְּרַכְתִּי לְכֶם בִּשְׁנָה].". It is found in the section of Leviticus called the Holiness Code [Chapters 17-26], designated H. Most commentators nowadays have abandoned the attempt to pick out specific traces of the Priestly writers, although it is generally acknowledged that such there are. There can, however, be little doubt that the Holiness Code contains material of especial interest to the priesthood. Leviticus 25.21 is concerned in particular with the sacred calendar and deals with the cycles of sabbatical year [every seven years] and with the year of Jubilee, the fiftieth year [seven times seven plus one]. The seventh year is the year in which the land is to lie fallow. The land has its sabbatical rest, a requirement which lies at the heart of good husbandry of the earth. It indicates a sound agricultural practice and real ecological concern. But it enshrines also a profound theological truth, namely that the earth belongs not to individual human owners, nor even to the tribes to whom it was allocated, but to God.

In the year of Jubilee, presumably once in a normal life-time, there is provision for the restoration of land that has been sold or forfeited to be returned to its original owners. Those who have fallen into slavery are given back their freedom and the whole nation remembers that once they were not a people but slaves in Egypt. The sense of dependance on God, even if normally acknowledged, would be heightened

---

reported in the Priestly material.



by the limitation of supplies and the need to conserve carefully one year's harvest to meet the needs of two years. It is in this setting that God's blessing is thought of as providing extra crops in the sixth year.

Norman Snaith talks of the blessing as "the equivalent of *mana*, that supernatural power of primitive belief."<sup>(30)</sup> The context does not permit the introduction of any sense of the magical but the words "I will command my blessing..." make "my blessing" into an extension of the divine personality in much the same way that the Hebrew scriptures speak of "my name", "my glory", and "my word". "My blessing" is also treated as the agent of God's purposes. Further, in 25.22, the author of the Holiness Code envisages God answering the objections of the recipients of his command. "What shall we eat in the seventh year, if we may not sow or gather in our crop?" Answer: "I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, so that it will bring forth fruit for three years." There are clearly problems relating to the chronology, but without needing to solve that particular difficulty - it may simply relate to the fact that the Jubilee year [year 50] followed a sabbatical year - it is abundantly clear that here the content of blessing is a great yield, that the crops will be super-prolific, in order to make provision for the time of sabbath and Jubilee. The blessing of God is lavish provision against the time when no planting takes place and the whole earth makes pause, when the people of Israel will learn again their dependance upon God as they once did during their desert wanderings after the Exodus.

Verses 1-21 of Numbers, chapter 6 are concerned with the

---

30. SNAITH 164

performance of the Nazirite vow. Then in 6.22-27 the Priestly writers turn to the sons of Aaron with instruction on the correct performance of the blessing. "Thus [on this wise] (31) you shall bless the people of Israel [6.23]." There is universal agreement that the actual words of the blessing [6.4-26] are older than their context, although just how much older varies considerably.(32) There are those who believe that the form of the Aaronic blessing came originally after Leviticus 9.22-23.(33) That the verses are detachable from their context is beyond dispute. The cultic concern of the Priestly writers and their desire to establish the prerogatives of the priestly caste are equally manifest but in the light of the fact that David and Solomon could bless the people [2 Samuel 6.18 & 1 Kings 8.14 & 55] we may well have here evidence of a growing sacerdotalism in the Jerusalem of the post-exilic period. However, that the bestowal of blessing was in any way limited to its correct performance by the authorised Aaronic priesthood is none the less inconceivable, for in the theology of the Priestly writers it is always and on every occasion Yahweh who is the source of blessing.(34) Philip Budd calls 6.27 "an halakhic comment on

---

31. ELLIOTT BINNS translates כִּדְבָר "on this wise" to reinforce the sense of instruction given. 41

32. There are those like GRAY who maintain that the blessing must be pre-exilic because of its affinity with the psalms. There are those like NOTH who argue that the simplicity of style of the blessing denotes greater antiquity than the context, some wanting to locate it right back in the Mosaic period. Noth himself is, however, more cautious recognising the speculative nature of any dating. 58

BUDD says that it is "widely recognized as earlier and traditional." 76 SEYBOLD will have none of it.

"Er wird wohl in seiner jetzigen Form erst nachexilisch in den Kreisen der Jerusalemer Tempelpriesterschaft entstanden sein." 65

33. ELLIOTT BINNS 41

GRAY 71

The suggestion goes back to WELLHAUSEN.

34. NOTH 58

the significance of the priestly blessing."<sup>(35)</sup> Precisely it reads: "And I [emphasised] will bless them..." The speaker is Yahweh. P.D. Miller goes so far as to claim that the repetition of the divine name in the blessing itself is not "syntactically necessary". The name of Yahweh is repeated to make it absolutely clear that it is he who dispenses blessing and not the priest who pronounces the words in his name.<sup>(36)</sup> When it is remembered that the form of the blessing is considerably older than the context in which it is put, not even the Priestly writers with their decided tendency to enhance the position of the priest could have made the blessing dependant upon its correct performance by a duly authorised person. They could not in any way have diverged from the established theological position that Yahweh alone is the source of blessing even if they believed he normally had "official channels" for doing it.

Nevertheless, there is in Numbers 6 an institutionalisation of the blessing, a settling of the form of the cultic act. Budd wonders whether there was some uncertainty about the exact form of the priestly blessing and whether the Priestly writers were trying to lay down the correct words to be used.<sup>(37)</sup> He suggests that the concern of the passage is to establish that the priestly blessing is the prerogative of the sons of Aaron [as opposed to rival claimants].<sup>(38)</sup> Indeed, Klaus Seybold in his monograph on the blessing of Numbers 6.22-27 <sup>(39)</sup> insists, that the cultic blessing is a priestly prerogative. He does not accept that it is a product of the Mosaic era, but claims

---

35. BUDD 75

36. MILLER 244

37. BUDD 77

38. BUDD 77

39. SEYBOLD 68



that it is comparatively late, from the circle of the priesthood of the Temple of Jerusalem.(40) There is a real sense in which God in Numbers 6 puts himself in the hands of the priests for the bestowal or the withholding of blessing.(41) How such a position adopted in the theology of the Priestly Writers is to be reconciled with the universal reference of blessing expressed in Genesis 1.28 poses something of a problem.

There are two possible ways of approach, one supportive of Seybold, the other diametrically opposed. Both approaches would involve dating the priestly writings in the period after the Exile. First, it is possible to see Numbers 6 as the end of a process of divine selectivity. The all-embracing perspective of Genesis 1 narrows down to focus on the Jerusalem Temple and its priesthood and its rites. It is, however, also possible to take the opposite point of view. If the Priestly Writers are describing in Numbers 6 what is in fact the case in their own day,

---

40. SEYBOLD 67

"Der aaronitische Segen, im Wortlaut überliefert in einer priesterschriftlichen Sekundärschicht und erst relativ spät bezeugt (Ps 67; IQS II), ist aller Wahrscheinlichkeit nach kein sehr altes Stück, sondern ein jüngerer Kunstprodukt aus den Kreisen der Jerusalemer Tempelpriesterschaft, das sich wohl erst nach und nach durchsetzen konnte, bis es dann - z.T. erst in nachalttestamentlicher Zeit nachweisbar - zum festen Bestandteil der Gottesdienstliturgie in Tempel, Synagoge und Kapitelsaal wurde."

41. SEYBOLD 66

"Es ist eine erstaunliche Behauptung, dass Jahwe, der Gott Israels an diese nach Num 6,22ff. den Aaroniden anvertraute Rezitation der Formel seine persönliche Segenszuwendung gebunden hat. Die Ermächtigung dazu wurzelt tief in der Geschichte der Jahwe-Segnungen an Israel. Hier ist dieses Geschehen institutionell gefasst und fixiert und damit in einem entscheidenden Punkt in die Hände von Menschen gelegt."

Following VON RAD he goes on to claim that Yahweh has made the sons of Aaron responsible for the administration or refusal of God's blessing.

Genesis 1 with its statement of the universal scope of blessing in Yahweh's intention becomes a protest against the narrow exclusivism of post-exilic Judaism. Neither avenue of approach resolves the question of the dating of the blessing.

The question may be resolved by asking for whose sake blessing is pronounced. Is it simply a wish for prosperity and well-being for those present at the focal act of worship in the Temple? Is it for Israel alone? Or does it have wider reference? If Numbers 6 is read in the light of Genesis 1, then the answer must be that it has the widest possible reference, i.e. to the whole of creation. "The P context for the blessing ordinance in Numbers 6 means, therefore, that the priests are to continue to pray for God's blessing upon the people, which began as a blessing upon all humanity, but which has been particularly known and experienced by this people by the way in which God has provided and cared for them throughout the vicissitudes of their history, giving them fertility, land, possessions, and victory; protecting them from harm, dealing with them in mercy, and granting them security and peace."<sup>(42)</sup> Blessing mediated through the priesthood in the Jerusalem sanctuary is God's intention for the whole human race.<sup>(43)</sup>

The content of the blessing which is elaborated in the above quotation from P.D. Miller in terms of prosperity, fertility and possessions, cannot be known directly from the text itself. Miller's statement is

---

42. MILLER 246-247

43. MILLER 248-249

This idea is spelled out in detail. In this respect MILLER is echoing WESTERMANN Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church 59 see also SEYBOLD who writes of the blessing in terms of its "Brückenfunktion vom kultischen zum profanen Lebensbereich". 68

undoubtedly right none the less when the cluster of ideas in the blessing is investigated. The associated ideas are "blessing", "keeping", "the face of Yahweh", "his grace" and "his peace", all linked with the notion of "his name" being "put upon the people of Israel".

line 1 [verse 24]: "The LORD bless you and keep you."

In each of the lines of the blessing the second half of the line seems to be an elaboration or explanation of the first part.(44) Presumably "keeping" must be understood in terms of the language of Psalm 121, where the Lord is my keeper. "Keeping" in that context involves help and protection, a vigilant care.

line 2 [verse 25]: "The LORD make his face [פָּנָיו] to shine upon you, and be gracious to you."

The face is the symbol of the presence of God. His presence is blessing. The brightness of his face is a sign of inward pleasure, showing grace and favour [חֵן].(45)

line 3 [verse 26]: "The LORD lift up his countenance [פָּנָיו] upon you, and give you peace [שָׁלוֹם]."(46)

The shining of the face of the Lord upon the worshippers in grace leads to their peace, which includes all the material benefits of prosperity, fertility and abundance, but it is the name of Yahweh which is the essential component of blessing.(47) "The actual placing of the Divine Name on Israel not only declares that they belong to God, but also ensures prosperity."(48)

44. SEYBOLD 38

45. For a study of "hen and hesed in the Old Testament", see W.A. LOFTHOUSE, ZAW 51 1933 29-35

46. see SNAITH et al 207

The literal translation is "peace".

"šālôm has a much wider meaning and involves prosperity, good health, wholeness and completeness in every way."

47. SEYBOLD 70

48. SNAITH 207



What then is the status of the blessing? Is it performative, indicative or optative? Although there is plenty of evidence in the Ancient Near East that blessing and cursing [including the taking of oaths, which were a kind of conditional curse] were originally rooted in magic, Old Testament usage is almost in its entirety concerned to remove any sense of the automatic working of the spoken word and to subject it to the will of Yahweh. Once again the concept has undergone a thorough process of demythologising in Israel. Being in the control of Yahweh there can be no possibility of blessing or cursing being performative [with one or two exceptions], certainly not in the period after the Exile. Nor is it likely that the blessing is indicative, descriptive of a state. The subject of the blessing is Yahweh, the people the object. It is much more likely that the blessing is optative, a wish for prosperity, a form of prayer of intercession.(49) That human beings are already blessed is expressed by the use of אֲשֶׁר־י,(50) but even when the form בִּרְגֵל־י is used its sense is normally optative rather than being the observation of blessing achieved.(51)

## 5.2 People blessing God

There are no occasions when the Priestly Writers in the Pentateuch use the root בִּרְגֵל with God as the object.

---

49. SEYBOLD 69

50. JANZEN HTR 1965 215-226

51. The problem of asserting that בִּרְגֵל־י is to be translated in an optative sense is that in many places in the Old Testament Yahweh is the object of it.

### 5.3 People blessing people

At first sight the two occurrences of blessing in the Priestly record of the meeting between Jacob and Pharaoh can simply be accounted for as a normal form of greeting and leave-taking [וַיִּבְרַךְ יַעֲקֹב] [אֶת־פַּרְעֹה]. Driver takes this view, with the qualification that it is a salutation with wishes for the welfare of the one greeted.<sup>(52)</sup> In this he is followed by Speiser who translates [47.7]: "Jacob paid respects to Pharaoh" and [47.10]: "Then Jacob took his leave from Pharaoh."<sup>(53)</sup> These blessings may also contain a note of thanksgiving. After all, Pharaoh has made a land grant giving Jacob and his family permission to settle the borderland of Goshen. It would not be inappropriate to give some sign of gratitude, for Jacob in his "sojournings" has lived a precarious landless existence.<sup>(54)</sup>

Another problem is the fact that Jacob is socially inferior to Pharaoh. Can an inferior bless a superior? There are those, as already indicated, who account for this situation by dismissing the blessing of Jacob upon Pharaoh as a merely conventional form of address. Others have resort to the theory that Pharaoh in this case is showing great deference to an old and venerable man, who is also Joseph's father. Skinner <sup>(55)</sup> tries to have the best of all worlds. He writes: "Joseph introduces his father to Pharaoh, - an impressive and dignified scene. - *Blessed*), i.e. "saluted" on entering [cf. 1 Sa.13.10, 2 Ki.4.29, 2 Sa.13.25, 19.40], but recorded no doubt, with a sense that "the less is blessed of the better" [Heb.7.7]." There may well be, for those reading

---

52. DRIVER Genesis 371

53. SPEISER Genesis 348-349

54. cf. BRUEGGEMANN Genesis 355

55. SKINNER Genesis 498

the story through the spectacles of the Exodus, a theological point being made. Pharaoh [Egypt] is blessed through the son of the promise, the one who in the line of Abraham, is the bearer of blessing to all the nations. Indeed, all unbeknowing the inferior is blessed by the superior, Jacob. There is therefore in the episode a certain dramatic irony, which can only be recognised with hindsight. The truly great one in this scene is Jacob and it is entirely appropriate that he should call down God's blessing upon Pharaoh.(56)

The work on "the tabernacle of the tent of the meeting" is completed [Exodus 39.32]. Great stress is laid upon the fact that it has all been done exactly as God commanded [39.42-43a]. The people have been scrupulous in producing precisely what is required. "And Moses blessed them [וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה][39.43b]." It is impossible to be dogmatic about what the phrase means. It is possible to see in it Moses the mediator between God and the people calling down God's blessing upon the people. It is possible to construe the blessing as a form of thanksgiving to the people for the work they have done. It is possible to believe that this is simply the writers' way of saying that he took his leave of the people after the presentation of the finished work. All of these interpretations are possible in this specific case.

Leviticus 9 concerns the installation of Aaron and his sons in the priesthood and describes the sacrifices they offered for the first time [וַיֵּשֶׂא אֱהֲרֹן אֶת־יָדָיו אֶל־הָעֶם וַיְבָרֶכֶם]. The narrative is concerned to establish the right way of performing the sacrifices and with the legitimacy of the priesthood. That the two things are intimately linked together is clearly established when two of Aaron's sons, Nadab and



Abihu, "offered unholy fire before the LORD" [Leviticus 10.1], that is, performed the ritual incorrectly. Norman Snaith argues that this story "stresses the terrible fate of the layman who tries to act as a priest",<sup>(57)</sup> believing that the point at issue concerns which parts of Aaron's family had a place in the priesthood. What is evident is that the correct performance of religious duties brings blessing, whereas failure to follow the prescribed way brings dire consequences.

The two blessings of 9.22 & 23 are not both necessary according to Martin Noth. He concludes that the second [וַיְבָרֶכְהוּ אֶת-הָעָם] is a later addition. "There is no reason for this second blessing. The blessing given by Aaron to the people in v.22a had been a fully valid blessing, hardly needing any confirmation or amplification. The entry of Moses with Aaron into the tent of meeting also seems pointless: nothing is added by way of explanation and it can only be supposed that a later hand wished to see Aaron led in by Moses, the great plenipotentiary of Yahweh, into the real holy place and thus authorized to frequent it."<sup>(58)</sup> It is, however, psychologically comprehensible even apart from questions of Moses legitimating or lending support to the priesthood of Aaron. After the formal liturgical blessing of the people by Aaron [presumably according to the formula of Numbers 6.24-26] entering the tent is understandable as a kind of formal "first-footing".

Further, Leviticus 9.22 gives a glimpse of the way in which liturgical blessing was performed. "Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people..." It is likely that in individual blessing the hands of the one giving the blessing were laid upon the head of the person being

---

57. SNAITH 75

58. NOTH 81

blessed. The blessing of a gathered congregation required uplifted hands to signify the blessing distributed on the heads of all those present.<sup>(59)</sup>

#### 5.4 Summary

The meaning of blessing in the Priestly Writers is set out in Genesis 1.28. Human beings, created in God's image, are intended to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it. They are to have dominion over all other living creatures. It is the power of procreation which they share with other living creatures [Genesis 1.22]. Blessing is an endowment, built into the creative processes. God wants creation to thrive. He made the right conditions for that to happen but within a covenant framework [cf. Genesis 9.1-17]. The provision of the sabbath, the sabbatical year and the year of Jubilee are not only for the benefit of human beings but also for the benefit of the earth itself [Genesis 2.3 & Leviticus 25]. They foreshadow the end-time.

God's first covenant with Adam was broken by Adam's sin. In the covenant with Noah after the Flood the relationship between human beings and the other living creatures has been changed. They now live in fear of the human race and are available as food but it is still the whole human race which is blessed, "Noah and his sons" [Genesis 9.1]. Amongst the children of Abraham Ishmael is given a blessing as well as Isaac. Pharaoh is blessed by Jacob. It is, however, Isaac who is heir to the promises made to Abraham and the Bethel tradition, which the Priestly Writers relate duplicating the Yahwist's story, affirms that the covenant succession is with Jacob/Israel.

---

59. See J. BEHM Die Handauflegung im Urchristentum

It is this tradition which the Priestly Writers use for their own political ends at the end of the period of the Exile. God still intends his people to be blessed, to be fruitful and multiply. He still intends them to have the land of promise.

In the years immediately following the Exile the universalism which reflects God's desire to bless all the created world focusses down onto God's special relationship with Israel. The chaos of the Exile is to be ordered once again by God's creative design. A special relationship becomes an exclusive relationship. The post-exilic concern for the purity of the nation is reflected in the Priestly Writers' story about Jacob not taking foreign wives.

In such an atmosphere there is among the priests a great urge towards the institutionalization of blessing [Leviticus 9]. The importance of the priesthood is emphasized so that blessing is seen as their special prerogative. That cannot mean their sole prerogative, for in the end the source of all blessing is God, the God whom the Priestly Writers designate אל ישׁר׳ל, God Almighty.



## Chapter 6

### The Theology of Blessing in the Historical Writers

#### 6.1 God blessing people

The allotment of land to Manasseh is described in Joshua 17.1-13 but two traditions have been conflated in verses 17.14-18 where the discussion with Joshua is on behalf of the "tribe of Joseph", reflecting a time before Joseph had been divided between Ephraim and Manasseh. The protest to Joshua that the tribe's allocation of land is not large enough is based on the fact that they are numerous [אֲשֶׁר-עַד-כֹּה בְרַכְנִי יְהוָה]. Joshua is not able to give them more land to the north. There is "only one immediate outlet"(1) the wooded hill country to the east, which because they are great in numbers they may well be able to conquer and clear. The blessing in 17.14 is evidenced by the way in which God has allowed them to increase. He is a God who gives increase in numbers.

In the story of Samson blessing relates to the exceptional endowments given to an individual [Judges 13]. Manoah's wife is barren. She is informed by a heavenly messenger that she will give birth to a son. He is to be special. He is to be a Nazirite. He will not drink alcohol nor eat any unclean [i.e. forbidden] foods. His hair will never be cut. His mother too must observe the taboos concerning food and drink. So, the unnamed wife of Manoah gives birth to a son, "and the boy grew, and

---

1. Garstang 234-235

the LORD blessed him" [Judges 13.24 cf also 1 Sam.2.26 & Luke 2.52].(2) The conjunction of growth and blessing suggests health and vigour. Such a link is also made by the following verse 13.25 in which the spirit of Yahweh comes upon him and sets him off on his career.(3) However, "the only virtue which the spirit seems to have given Samson is physical strength pure and simple - certainly not wisdom or ethical consistency."(4) The blessing of Yahweh and the gift of the spirit of Yahweh prepare this most curious of the judges for his phenomenal feats of daring in Israel's conflict with the Philistines. None the less Yahweh is the one who empowers specific people for particular tasks.

The story of the progress of the Ark of the Covenant from Baale-judah to the city of David is a curious one [2 Samuel 6]. Uzzah, the son of Abinadab, dies immediately after touching it. This causes terror amongst the people. After all, Uzzah, by reaching out his hand, was merely trying to prevent the Ark being upset from the cart on which it was placed. The God whose presence in the midst of his people is symbolised by the Ark of the Covenant is a holy and terrible God. It is this very fact which makes the Ark the right cult object to carry with the army into battle, and which evinces the title "Yahweh of hosts", in whose name David blesses the people [2 Samuel 6.18]. As a result of the awful fate of Uzzah, David leaves the Ark in the safe-keeping of Obed-edom.

---

2. variant: εὐλόγησεν αὐτό κύριος where αὐτό refers to τὸ παιδάριον.

3. BOLING 226

"The concluding reference to Samson's display of the Yahweh spirit is anticipatory. It will be explicated by the incidents of ch.14, which mark him as having excellent potential for the office of military leadership, in terms of physical prowess."

4. SOGIN 236; see also 229

Obed-edom is a Gittite, presumably a Philistine from Gath. Many Philistines remained loyal to David and the Philistine Obed-edom is blessed and all his household with him because of the presence of the Ark [בֵּרַךְ יְהוָה אֶת-בֵּית עֹבֵד אֲדָם וְאֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-לּוֹ] 2 Samuel 6.12]. The older commentators almost take it as axiomatic that the blessing received is because Obed-edom was in fact a worshipper of Yahweh.(5) More recent commentaries make no such assumption.(6) Indeed it is by no means clear that because he had a personal commitment to David and was probably engaged in his service that he would also be a devotee of his God. However, that he is blessed and all his household with him is directly stated. "...we are perhaps to imagine fertility in his family, his cattle and his fields as well as other pieces of good fortune."(7) In fact, in 1 Chronicles 26.5 the blessing on Obed-edom consists precisely in God giving him eight sons. It is the gift of male descendants and the ability to multiply and produce a large family. The Ark is a kind of good luck charm or fetish, so that Ackroyd can write of "the beneficent effect of the Ark's presence".(8) Although the idea of blessing involved is highly mechanistic, as a powerful symbol of the presence of Yahweh with his people, having the Ark in his household is enough to ensure that Obed-edom and his family prosper.

David once reassured that the Ark will not bring harm but rather to the contrary will enable him to thrive takes the Ark over again and continues with it to Jerusalem. There is a certain dramatic irony in

---

5. SMITH 295

"Of course, as a follower of David and a resident in the land of Israel, he was a worshipper of Yahweh."

6. McKANE 208

7. HERTZBERG 279

8. ACKROYD 67



his prayer *וְעַתָּה הוֹאֵל וּבָרַךְ אֶת־בֵּית עַבְדְּךָ לְהִיּוֹת לְעוֹלָם לְפָנֶיךָ* "Now therefore may it please thee to bless the house of thy servant that it may continue for ever before thee; for thou, O LORD GOD, hast spoken, and with thy blessing shall the house of thy servant be blessed for ever [2 Samuel 7.29.]. It is a prayer for the establishment of David's dynasty.(9) Verse 12 makes this clear. Yahweh says: "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom." God promises that whereas he did not establish the sons of Saul on the throne, David will be followed by his own descendants. From the perspective of the Chronicler this has already happened [see 1 Chronicles 17.27]. The irony is that David wants to build a house for Yahweh, a house of cedar. God forbids it. David is not to build a house for his God. God will build a house for him. David's son after him will build the Temple [7.13]. Yahweh will not withdraw from him his steadfast love [*חַסֵּד*].(10) "The reign of Saul was brief,

#### 9. WEHMEIER 140

"Das Gebet Davids beruft sich auf die göttliche Verheissung, die Dynastie dauernd zu erhalten, und bittet um ihre Erfüllung..."

#### MITCHELL 100

"David expresses confidence that God will fulfill his promises regarding his dynasty, yet at the same time he realizes that their fulfilment is a long way off. His precarious position during much of his life must have made him question the security of his dynasty, and so he prays earnestly for fulfilment of what God has already promised to do."

10. Mitchell, following Arthur Weiser, considers *hesed* to be concerned with the "grace of kingship". 73-74

"The people expected God to specially bless the king. If however usurpation occurred or if military defeat, famine, or poverty characterized his reign, the people would conclude that God considered the king illegitimate and had withdrawn his *hesed*, the "grace of kingship", from the king [1 Sam 7:15; see Weiser 1962 : 214]. God's special blessing upon the king was in part a fulfillment of the patriarchal promises of royal descendants [Gen 17:16,20; 35:9].

because Yahweh rejected him, but David is the man of his choice and the throne bestowed on David is to be perpetuated by his posterity."(11)

"וּמִבְרָכָתְךָ"- RSV "with thy blessing" [2 Samuel 7.29b] does not really capture the force of בְּרָכָה, which is better translated "in consequence of thy blessing". The blessing is certain of fulfilment precisely because it is Yahweh who has spoken [בְּרָכָה].(12) From the fuller content of the promises expressed in verses 12f it is the continuance of his line upon the throne that concerns David, and it is for this reason that he appeals to Yahweh's blessing previously announced. There is nothing magical about the fulfilment of it.(13) It will happen as Yahweh has said, not because there is automatic power in the spoken word but because of the nature of the God who speaks, the one who keeps נֶאֱמַר. Its accomplishment depends on the willingness of Yahweh to perform what he has promised.(14)

---

However, God's promise to David of a lasting dynasty in 2 Sam 7 = 1 Chron 17 is the most important promise regarding kingship..."

11. McKANE 219

12. PLASSMANN 108-109, 145 & 146

"God's בְּרָכָה is conceived as a benediction only when He is represented as speaking."

"...the Pual seems to be employed as the passive of declarative, denominative בְּרָכָה, and may therefore be regarded as a *verbum dicendi*."

"...God is here represented as pronouncing the benediction."

13. PLASSMANN overstates the position concerning the automatic, mechanical efficacy of the word once uttered. 110

14. The beginning of the verse 29 in the Massoretic text reads: וְעַתָּה הוֹאֵל וּבְרָכָה .

"הוֹאֵל" only known in the Hiphil [from הָאֵל] = "be willing" [DRIVER 279]

"And now be willing and bless..." The fulfilment of the promise lies in the will of Yahweh and not in the automatic power of the word.

LXX reading ἀρχαῖς reflects an underlying אָרַח [Hiphil of אָרַח... in the Hiphil "to begin"].

Solomon does indeed succeed to the throne [1 Kings 2] and he immediately sets about settling old scores, one of which is with Shimei. He acts partly as a typical Middle Eastern ruler securing his throne against possible rival claimants and partly as someone paying off old enmities. The words of blessing embedded in 1 Kings 2.45 [וְהַמֶּלֶךְ] שְׁלֹמֹה בָּרוּךְ וְכִסֵּא דָוִד יְהִי נֶכֶן לִפְנֵי יְהוָה עַד-עוֹלָם - indeed the whole of verses 44 & 45 - are regarded by some as an interpolation. They introduce into the story of Shimei elements of justification for his execution which are unnecessary. Solomon is said to appeal to Shimei's attitude to and treatment of David as the reason for instructing Benaiah to put an end to him. The fact that he has broken his word and left Jerusalem in pursuit of his fugitive servants is, however, adequate justification for putting him to death. He was expressly told to remain in Jerusalem if he wanted to live and he had accepted the condition laid upon him.(15)

There are none the less many theories advanced to explain the blessing which is after all a claim to blessing for himself on the part of Solomon. There are those who like Gray think that it makes an end of the curse pronounced by Shimei on David.(16) The blessing renders the curse finally ineffective. There are those like Wehmeier who understand the function of the blessing to be to ward off the curse that Solomon calls down upon the head of Shimei [v.44b]. The curse which Shimei pronounced is rebounding on Shimei. Solomon utters the blessing in order to prevent the curse rebounding upon his own

---

15. JONES 119

16. GRAY 110



head.(17)

The content of the blessing is the continuance of the Davidic line. "If God blesses the king, his household shall endure and his throne shall be established forever." (18) There is, however, a lingering underlying belief in the automatic effect of the spoken word. Solomon prefers to make sure that nothing untoward will happen to him and his house. So he pronounces a blessing upon himself just in case...

There is a magical dimension also in the prayer for blessing [אֲמַן-בְּרַךְ] in 1 Chronicles 4.10 addressed to Yahweh by Jabez. It is a brief aside written into the list of the names of the sons of Judah. Jabez says: "Oh that thou wouldst bless me and enlarge my border, and that thy right hand might be with me, and that thou wouldst keep me from harm so that it might not hurt me!" The name Jabez is explained in verse 9. His mother called him Jabez "because I bore him in pain". At the heart of these words is a word-play in Hebrew, which identifies the name Jabez with the verb צָבַע [to pain, hurt]. However, the radicals of the verb have been transposed in the name. Jabez should strictly derive from the verb צָבַע, whose meaning is according to BDB unknown. Nevertheless the derivation of the name as stated must be taken at face value if the prayer in verse 10 is to make sense.

The name given to Jabez is a name of ill-omen. Anyone bearing it might well be expected to have a life of misfortune. He therefore prays that

---

17. WEHMEIER 104

"Nach 1 K 2,44b hat Salomo einen Fluch über Simeï ausgesprochen. Um zu verhindern, dass ein solcher Fluch auf den Sprechenden und seine Angehörigen zurückfällt, war es in derartigen Situationen üblich, ihm einen Segenswunsch anzufügen."

18. PLASSMANN 98

God will be with him to protect him, to keep him from hurt. So, the blessing he asks for is an attempt to forestall mishap. The effect of beginning life with such a name is a severe handicap. However, just as it is possible to turn a curse aside or counteract it by pronouncing a blessing, so Jabez hopes to gain God's favour and avoid the fate written into his very name by asking God for his blessing. The specific content of the blessing is the request for more space, presumably for his flocks. "It will be remembered that for the Nomad the next concern, after the fertility of the soil, is expanse of territory." (19) We are told that God granted his request.

Curse then can be turned aside by pronouncing a blessing [1 Kings 2.45]. A person's whole destiny can be changed by pronouncing a blessing [1 Chronicles 4.10]. God can also change curse into blessing [Nehemiah 13.2 - an allusion to the story of Balaam], although this latter reference is misapplied, since in the Numbers story Israel is already blessed. It is not a case of Yahweh turning a curse into a blessing. It is rather that he prevents his people being cursed.

## 6.2 People blessing God

The statements which relate בָּרַךְ to God can be divided into three main groups, plus two special cases. They are:-

### 6.2.1 Assertions that God was praised

### 6.2.2 The בָּרַךְ formula

### 6.2.3 Summons to praise

### 6.2.4 Special Cases

### 6.2.1 Assertions that God was praised

Joshua 22.33 says וַיְבָרְכוּ אֱלֹהִים בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. In spite of the suggested textual variant (20) the meaning of the blessing is clear. Having been assured that the Transjordanian tribes have not forsaken the worship of Yahweh once having crossed the Jordan, the people *bless* God that they will not have to make war on the Reubenites, the Gadites and the tribe of Manasseh. God is praised and thanked that civil war will not be necessary.

There is a similar resounding note of praise and thanksgiving in 1 Chronicles 29.10,20 וַיְבָרְכוּ וַיְזַכֵּךְ דָּוִיד אֶת־יְהוָה לְעֵינֵי כָל־הַקָּהָל ] The prayer offered is in response to the generous gifts made for the building of the Temple. It contains a lofty notion of offertory and includes a recognition of God as the source of all things. Human beings can bring nothing to God which does not already belong to him. He is the source of power and glory, victory and majesty. Riches and honour come from God. "...all things come from thee, and of thy own have we given thee [1 Chronicles 29.14]." The prayer is a paeon of praise offered at the point where David is handing over to his son Solomon. In spite of the persistent tradition that Yahweh forbade David to build the Temple this prayer serves to emphasise the Chronicler's insistent claim that David played

---

20. The LXX would require the emendation of the Hebrew text to read אֱלֹהֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.



an important rôle in the building of the first Temple.(21)

That Yahweh is the source of plenty and therefore the object of thanks and praise is found also in the context of Hezekiah's reforms. [2 Chronicles 31.8 וַיְבָרֶכֶּה אֶת־יְהוָה וְאֵת עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל] Hezekiah reorganises the priests and levites and commands the people to give what the law prescribes for them. The response of the people is overwhelming. The tithe is brought and piled up. The needs of the priesthood are met with superabundance. Thanksgiving for this plenty is offered to Yahweh as well as to the people. "Here the meaning of brk Piel includes both "to thank" and "to praise". The verb takes both God and man as the direct objects. There is however a difference in the meaning of the verb with each direct object. As the immediate donors, the people are thanked, and the element of praise is secondary. God is ultimately responsible for the donations, but as a more remote party, he is primarily praised ... The difference in the identity of the two objects is enough to indicate that a different nuance of the verb is intended ..."(22) There is, however, in the text neither linguistic nor syntactical reason for such a distinction. It is based solely on the presuppositions of the interpreter. Both are legitimately praised [see WILLIAMSON 375]. The offering of thanksgiving is appropriate with regard to both God and the people but as verse 10 makes clear, Yahweh supplies what is necessary for his service, significantly and characteristically, with overflowing generosity. Even when they have given to God, more than enough remains.

---

21. TOWNER CBQ XXX 1968 391 footnote 11a.

22. MITCHELL 136-137

The speculation concerning the content of the blessing uttered by Ezra is oddly wide-ranging [Nehemiah 8.6 **וַיְבָרֶךְ עֶזְרָא אֶת־יְהוָה קֹאֲלֵהֶם** ] (23) This is presumably because the reference is to an act of blessing [German: Segnung](24) and the specific content can only be inferred from the context. What can clearly be learned concerns the ritual accompanying the blessing of Yahweh. His praise involves the uttering of prayer and the people's response. The posture of the worshippers is indicated. They raise their hands, bow their heads and put their faces to the ground. Kidner writes: "The adoration was for God, and the attitudes were eloquent for some of the main facets of worship: salutation, or yearning, by the uplifted hands; self-abasement, or entreaty, by the gesture of prostration." (25) All of this happens during the great celebration when the walls of the city have been rebuilt. The people gather before the Water Gate and listen to the solemn reading of the law.

The whole episode has the flavour of a new beginning, a renewal of the covenant. The covenant between God and the people is re-established. The act of blessing Yahweh is consequent upon the people's penitence

---

23. MYERS translates the verse: "Ezra praised Yahweh". He then writes: "The ceremony began with the blessing [invocation] of Ezra and the vocal symbolic response of the people." 153

BROCKINGTON speculates that Ezra blessed the Lord "perhaps with such words as now stand at the end of Ps.135". 166

see also CLINES 184

"The blessing would probably be a brief thanksgiving for the law, such as are given in the Talmud for use before reading scripture."

He wonders if the somewhat unusual title "the great God" preserves a part of Ezra's blessing formula. 184

24. see MOWINCKEL 23

This blessing [Segnung] is a main part of the worship and is constituted by the praise of Yahweh [die Lobpreisung Jahwä's].

25. KIDNER 106

and through it a right relationship with God and his law is enjoyed.(26)

### 6.2.2 The בָּרוּךְ Formulas

[a] בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה [Ruth 4.14; 1 Samuel 25.39; 1 Kings 5.21 & 8.56]

[b] בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל [1 Samuel 25.32; 1 Kings 1.48 & 8.15; 1 Chronicles 16.36; 2 Chronicles 2.11 & 6.4]

[c] בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ [2 Samuel 18.28]

[d] בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ [Ezra 7.27]

[e] בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִינוּ מֵעוֹלָם וְעַד-עוֹלָם [1 Chronicles 29.10]

In each case RSV translates initially "Blessed be the LORD", except in 1 Chronicles 29.10 where it translates "Blessed art thou, O LORD..."

בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה is a shout of praise. When Ruth and Boaz marry, they have a son. "Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without next of kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel [Ruth 4.14]." The women, acting like a Greek chorus, praise God for the gift of a child. It is presumably the women who

---

26. It is FAHLGREN who recognises in this context the covenant nature of the occasion. Ezra blesses Yahweh. "Hierdurch wird die segenbringende Verbindung zwischen ihm und dem Menschen angeknüpft, wiederhergestellt oder verstärkt." The penitence of the people is the key. "...dann bedeutet es Wiederherstellung eines Gemeinschaftsverständnisses, das gebrochen war oder im Begriff stand, es zu werden." 196



utter the blessing-praise because it is the women who are predominantly engaged in the activity surrounding the birth. They acknowledge Yahweh as the source of offspring. The fertility of Boaz and Ruth is to be directly attributed to God who is the fountainhead of life.

It is possible that the second part of Ruth 4.14 refers to God but more probable that it refers to the newly-born child [as do the clauses that follow]. It is verses like this with their associations with child-birth and the promise of children that enable Wehmeier to claim that to call Yahweh בָּרֵךְ is to acknowledge him to be "rich in blessing". Blessed is Yahweh. He is the source of the good things that human beings enjoy.(27)

When Yahweh is blessed in 1 Samuel 25.32 [בָּרַךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל], the statement of praise and thanksgiving to Yahweh for enabling Abigail to act graciously towards David and his men is expressed not to Nabal but to his wife. "And David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me!" She has been politically astute in welcoming David and has recognized in him the likely winner in the struggle between him and Saul. What she has

---

#### 27. WEHMEIER 122

"Nach Rt 4,14 sind es die israelitischen Frauen, die Naemi gegenüber den Lobruf anstimmen: "bārūk ist Jahwe, der dir heute einen Löser nicht versagt hat, und sein [des neugeborenen Kindes] Name werde gefeiert in Israel". Bezug nehmend auf die unmittelbar vorher berichtete Geburt eines Nachkommen, erweisen sich die Frauen darin mit Naemi solidarisch, dass sie das ihr zukommende Lob Gottes singen. Hier liegt der Nachdruck natürlich auf dem Bekenntnis, dass Jahwe bārūk "reich an Segen" ist, und es wird nicht sein Name betont wie in den gleichlautenden Sprüchen im Munde von Nicht-Israeliten."

cf.also BICKERMAN RB 69 1962 527 & PLASSMANN 117

done in giving him aid is an expression of the will of Yahweh towards David. "God is [of Himself] abiding [and abounding] in blessedness, i.e. he is intrinsically and perfectly blessed." (28) Abigail bathes in the reflected glory. This is reinforced in 25.33 by David's praise of Abigail's discernment. [Almost any of the translations on offer are preferable to RSV's "discretion".] (29) She has had the political good sense and sound judgement to back the winner, which is more than can be said of her husband Nabal.

When the death of Nabal is announced [1 Samuel 25.39], David again blesses Yahweh for removing an enemy. The spontaneous gloating over the death of an enemy is distasteful in modern ears. The ancient world does not, however, seem to have had any problem about ascribing victory in battle, political assassination or death in natural circumstances, to the intervention of Yahweh. Part of being blessed is to see enemies swept aside. Nabal's death is seen as the visitation by God of his loutish behaviour upon his own head, when perhaps all he did was opt for the losing side! בָּרַךְ יְהוָה!

The death of Absalom is likewise a cause for blessing Yahweh [בָּרַךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ - 2 Samuel 18.28]. Ahimaaz bows his face to the earth and says: "Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king." The content of the blessing is indisputably military victory, but it is Yahweh's victory. It is he who protects the king against the rebels. The very

---

28. PLASSMANN 121

29. The Hebrew is טַעַם.

DRIVER 202 "tact"; ACKROYD 194 "good sense"; McCARTER 391 "judgement"; LXX has τρόπος, "manner of life", "character", perhaps "conduct".

expression "men who raised their hand against the king" defines them as rebels and proclaims their action illegitimate. God is the author of victory. "The formula also has a juridical function: because the formula attributes victory to God's retribution, it declares David to be in the right, and Absalom as the guilty party." (30)

David is not fortunate in his sons. Absalom is dead. Adonijah prematurely celebrates his accession to the throne at a time when the old king is arranging for his other son Solomon to be anointed in his place. Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, stage-manages the whole affair with consummate skill, with the help of Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet and Benaiah, David's "hatchet man". The guests at Adonijah's abortive party disappear in all directions when they realise that they have opted for the wrong man. David's response to the establishment of Solomon on the throne is to bless Yahweh [ *בָּרַךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל* ], which, as Gray asserts, must mean that he expresses thanks to him for remembering his promise to establish the house of David and to ensure that one of his sons succeeds him on the throne. A dynasty is founded and a new hereditary principle introduced into the political life of Israel. Father is followed by son to rule over the people. (31) Whereas the content of the promise to Abraham is many descendants, the blessing of David involves the assurance that his descendants will continue on the throne of Israel. (32)

---

30. MITCHELL 155  
WEHMEIER 122-123

31. GRAY 94

32. MATTSON 88-90 et al

Mattson's thesis concerns the relationship of the Abrahamic blessings to the Davidic dynasty. "The analysis of the content of the blessings will show that the blessings were preserved because of their usefulness to the dynastic state. Their point of view is consistent with the ideology of the monarchy."



Once Solomon is in fact settled in his father's place he sets about the task of building a house to the name of the Lord. He sends to Hiram king of Tyre to arrange for the supply of building materials [1 Kings 5 & 2 Chronicles 2]. "When Hiram heard the words of Solomon, he rejoiced greatly, and said, "Blessed be the LORD this day, who has given to David a wise son to be over this great people [בָּרַךְ יְהוָה הַיּוֹם]."" That this blessing is recorded on the lips of Hiram does not necessitate the belief that he was a worshipper of Yahweh, any more than it is necessary to believe that Obed-edom worshipped Yahweh.(33) It would, however, constitute a recognition that the God of Solomon is as real as the gods of Tyre. The textual variants are adequately dealt with by G.H. Jones.(34)

The blessing has to do with the succession. Hiram praises God that he has set a wise son on the throne of David to rule over the people of Israel. The treaty setting of the blessing is also apparent. Hiram has been a friend and ally of David. There must therefore have been some anxiety in Hiram's mind as to whether his treaty relationship with

---

33. See 1 Chronicles 16.36, part of the Psalm inserted into 2 Samuel 6.12b-19 and parallel of Psalm 106.48. LXX translates 1 Chronicles 16.36 εὐλογημένος κύριος ὁ θεὸς Ἰσραὴλ, whereas in Psalm 106.48 it reads εὐλογητὸς κύριος ὁ θεός. Εὐλογητὸς is most commonly found when blessing is addressed to God. There is no apparent reason why LXX should translate these two texts differently.

34. JONES 156

"The acknowledgement of the LORD (extended in Luc to 'the Lord, the God of Israel') by Hiram need not cause difficulty, as there are many examples naming another people's deity both in the Bible (Jg.11:21; 2 Kg.18:25ff) and outside (cf. the Amarna letters and the Moabite Stone; see Montgomery,p.134)."

cf. also KLOSTERMANN, cited BURNEY 54-55

"...the expression יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל is more appropriate in the mouth of Hiram than יְהוָה only."

see the parallel, 2 Chronicles 2.v.11

David would survive. That Solomon wishes to carry through a project David would like to have done reassures Hiram that David's policies will be continued by Solomon. There is to be peace between them. The treaty will continue in force.

Wehmeier's thesis that the blessing of Yahweh is an acknowledgement that he is blessing-filled (35) can only be maintained by unnecessary amendment of the text in the case of 1 Kings 5. He suggests that "this day" [הַיּוֹם] is an addition to the text stemming from a later liturgical tradition. There is no warrant for suppressing the phrase and his conjecture that the author wanted to indicate that this foreign king had not properly understood the nature of Israel's God is too subtle. If, however, "this day" is left in, בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה הַיּוֹם might be translated as a summons to praise Yahweh, i.e. "Blessed be Yahweh this day". It would not be possible to translate "Blessed is Yahweh this day" as if he were not blessed otherwise. It might be possible though to translate as "Worthy of praise is Yahweh this day" - again not in the sense that he is not worthy of praise on any other day - but quite specifically that he is to be praised on this occasion for giving David a wise son to follow after him to build the Temple. Wehmeier's translation "Reich an Segen" can only be sustained in this instance by an illegitimate doctoring of the text which does not take the context seriously.(36)

The account of the completion of the Temple is contained in 1 Kings 8 and 2 Chronicles 6. Solomon blesses the people and then says: "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel [1 Kings 5.15]." Sometimes this cry of

---

35. WEHMEIER 127-128

36. MITCHELL 170-171

praise and thanksgiving is a spontaneous response to specific acts of Yahweh. Sometimes it is a response to everything he has done in faithfulness to his promises.(37) The perpetual faithfulness of Yahweh is described in verses 15-21. The specific occasion of praise is the completion of the Temple. Congratulations and thanks are addressed to God as the source of blessing.(38) God is with his people.(39) "The presence of Yahweh with Israel signifies the unbroken covenant-relationship, which assures the future of Israel."(40) They are in an intimate relationship with him which guarantees their well-being. The Temple itself is a powerful symbol of his presence. That their blessing-relationship with Yahweh is given frequent expression in praise and thanksgiving to him, does not, however, really justify Fahlgren's belief that continual praise produces blessing with compound interest.(41)

Apart from one other occurrence in Psalm 119.12, 1 Chronicles 29.10 [וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִיד בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אָבִינוּ מִעוֹלָם וְעַד-עוֹלָם] is unique in the Hebrew scriptures. "Blessed art thou, O LORD, the God of Israel our father, for ever and ever." Except for six occasions(42)

---

37. cf. Ezra 7.27-28 which links the two types of response, sounding a note of praise and thanksgiving in relation to the edict of Artaxerxes and underlining Yahweh's steadfast love [חַסֵּד] and abiding presence. See PREUSS ZAW 80 1968 139-173

& also VETTER Jahwes Mitsein ein Ausdruck des Segens

38. GRAY 199

39. JONES 199

40. GRAY 215

41. FAHLGREN 197

"Je häufiger man ihn segnet, um so grösser und reicher wird auch die b<sup>e</sup>rākā, die über sein Volk kommt."

42. see Ruth 3.10; 1 Samuel 15.13; 23.21; 25.33; 26.25; 2 Samuel 2.5. Quoting F. Horst, SCHOTTROFF claims that the basic form [Grundform] of blessing in ancient Israel is בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה. "Auch bei der Segensformel handelt es sich ursprünglich wohl um ein magisch-selbstwirksam



when the phrase "blessed art thou..." is addressed to people, the expression occurs in these two places only with God as the partner in dialogue. What is the significance of these specific forms of praise?

The Jewish writer, Ismar Elbogen, thinks that this direct form of address to God was adopted by the men of the synagogue as the habitual form of Jewish prayer even though in origin he believes it to have been the expression of a strongly marked religious individualism. He gives no real evidence for this.<sup>(43)</sup> It is the American scholar, W. Sibley Towner, who examines the place of 1 Chronicles 29.10 & Psalm 119.12 in the development of Jewish prayer. He claims that "the older indirect formula [whether spontaneous or cultic in setting] was primarily a proclamation of God's graciousness manifested in deeds past and present. The pronunciation of the benediction might be identified as an act of worshipping YHWH [Gn 24,26]; it might be uttered as a blessing over the heads of the assembly [1 Kings 8,55]. Yet, in both cases it proved to be a statement *about* YHWH rather than an address to him in the second person. Now, in this latest biblical variant of the formula, the dichotomy is cleared up. The blessing has become a personal and direct address to God alone."<sup>(44)</sup> Mitchell agrees that the appearance of these two examples of second person blessing in the scriptures did not lead to the growth of usage of this form of blessing in the apocryphal writings, in the literature of Qumran and post-biblical Jewish prayers and liturgies. He is undoubtedly right that "it is improbable that such a rare biblical form

---

gedachtes, machtgeladenes Wort, das selbst schafft, was es zuspricht. Sein ursprünglicher Modus ist wie der der Fluchformel der Indikativ." SCHOTTROFF 163-164

43. ELBOGEN 241

44. TOWNER 392

would be adopted as the normative form by so many groups if it was not commonly employed outside the Bible".(45) It may, however, be that these two isolated references simply reflect an incipient practice of the time of the Chronicler. Mitchell's own conclusion is that these two occurrences of **אָתָּה בָּרַךְ** "are due to harmonisation to the second person contexts"(46) but if such is the case one might have expected rather more examples of it. The dominant note of David's prayer is notwithstanding one of praise. He expresses gratitude for what God has done and for what God has given to his people.

### 6.2.3 Summons to praise

There are four occasions when the basic reference of **בָּרַךְ** is a call to others to praise and give thanks to God. These passages are instructive about the content of God's blessing. There are many difficulties and exegetical problems, for example, in the Song of Deborah and Barak, not least in relation to the verses containing reference to blessing [Judges 5.2 & 9 **בָּרַכְכוּ יְהוָה**]. It is, however, in the end clear that Yahweh is to be praised and thanked that leaders have come forward and the people volunteered for military service at times of national danger. Leadership and service in time of war is understood to be Yahweh's gift to his people. **בָּרַכְכוּ יְהוָה**. It is as appropriate for them to give thanks for that as it is to give thanks for the gifts which make possible the building of the Temple [cf. 1 Chronicles 29.20].

The visit of the Queen of Sheba to the court of Solomon is told in such

---

45. MITCHELL 159

46. MITCHELL 160

a way as to enhance his reputation and standing [1 Kings 10.9 & 2 Chronicles 9.8]. His wisdom and his wealth are paraded before her until she is completely overcome by the range and extent of them. She acknowledges that what she has heard about Solomon was true far beyond her imaginings. "Happy are your wives! Happy are these servants, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom!"(47)

יְהִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּרוּךְ.

Sheba is prepared to honour Yahweh, Solomon's God, as the source of his riches and wisdom. That does not mean that she became a Yahwist, in spite of persistent legend which proclaims her as the founder of a new branch of Yahwism, sited variously between Ethiopia and the Persian Gulf. She acknowledges Yahweh, "your God". However, in spite of his main thesis concerning the בָּרוּךְ-formula whereby he translates it as "reich an Segen", (48) Wehmeier recognises the uniqueness of the construction of the Queen of Sheba's blessing of Yahweh. He has no doubt on this occasion that the use of בָּרוּךְ with יְהִי requires to be translated as a call or summons to praise and worship. Whereas "reich an Segen" normally indicates a quality or characteristic of God to which nothing can be added, in 1 Kings 10.9 the usage is akin to the

---

47. In verse 8 the commentators are unanimous in reading נְשִׂיךָ [wives] for אֲנָשִׁיךָ [men], since "men" and "servants" would be tautological.

It should also be noted that in verse 8 we meet the use of אֲשַׁרִּי [μακάριος]. The context confirms its use as the cry of an observer commenting on the happiness of others.

48. WEHMEIER 128 note 104. He appeals for support to BICKERMAN 527

"L'homme n'envoie pas sa bénédiction: il ne prétend pas transmettre son fluide bénissant vers la divinité, il constate seulement que celle-ci est béni, c'est-à-dire pleine d'efficacité bienfaisante."



way in which the Pual [מְבָרֵךְ] is used with יְהוָה.(49) The blessing is therefore directed to Sheba's human hearers as an exhortation to praise God rather than to God himself. The emphasis in יְהוָה יְהוָה is on the name of God. It is Yahweh who is to be praised. It is not an attribute of God that is being proclaimed. Those surrounding the Queen of Sheba are being called to praise God for the prosperity of the land under the wise king he has set upon the throne.(50)

קוּמוּ בָרְכוּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מִן־הָעוֹלָם עַד־הָעוֹלָם וּבָרְכוּ שֵׁם כְּבוֹדָה  
 וּמְרוֹמָם עַל־כָּל־בְּרָכָה וּתְהִלָּה . The textual problems within Nehemiah  
 9.5 have led the commentators to seek to resolve the difficulties at  
 the expense of noticing the wider context. The words "from everlasting  
 to everlasting" do indeed sit uncomfortably with the exhortation to the  
 people to bless Yahweh.(51) RSV follows the Syriac in translating:  
 "Blessed be..." for "let them bless..." but NEB goes further and  
 transfers the phrase "from everlasting to everlasting" to what the  
 congregation is exhorted to say in blessing Yahweh. It is clear none  
 the less that whichever translation is correct the blessing is a  
 summons to praise God and that its setting is the official cultus.(52)  
 The parallelism of the nouns "blessing" and "praise" leaves no doubt  
 that they are virtually synonymous, although in linguistic terms it must

---

49. WEHMEIER 174

Speaking of the use of the Pual participle מְבָרֵךְ but also of this unique example of יְהוָה בָּרַךְ in 1 Kings 10.v.9 he writes:

"Anders als bei der Lobformel *bārūk jhwh* [in ihrer regulären Verwendung] geht es hier nicht um die Konstatierung eines Wesensmerkmals Gottes, sondern um einen Aufruf zu menschlichem Handeln, nicht um das Lob selbst, sondern um die Aufforderung dazu."

50. WEHMEIER 130

51. see CLINES 191-192

52. WEHMEIER 161 & 168

be argued that the use of both words, whilst indicating close identity nevertheless preserves some distinction. Of special interest is the notion that although Yahweh is above all blessing and praise – for he needs nothing – yet the people is exhorted to offer him this worship.(53)

The wider context, it should be noted, is a recital of the history of God's dealings with his people. The elements of a covenant renewal are manifest. There is an historical prologue recounting God's faithfulness [9.32], a binding of the people in renewed commitment [9.38] with an appeal to witnesses, and then a series of stipulations which are laid upon the people. All of this happens in the context of a reciting of the law reinforcing the covenant nature of what happened in response to the summons to "stand up and bless the LORD..."

#### 6.2.4 Special Cases

ברך can be used to convey the idea of cursing or reviling. There are seven examples in the Old Testament of the euphemistic use of the Piel of ברך with God as the object, where its meaning is the direct opposite of the stated one. There are two examples in 1 Kings 21 [verse 10 בִּרְכָה אֱלֹהִים וְמֶלֶךְ & verse 13 בִּרְכָה נְבוֹת אֱלֹהִים וְמֶלֶךְ] and four in the Book of Job, with a seventh, slightly more problematic example which may not be an euphemism at all, in the Psalms.(54)

Naboth is stoned – a confirmation that the charge against him is in fact blasphemy [see Leviticus 24.10ff]. He is falsely accused of having "cursed" God and the king. The Hebrew text uses the Piel of ברך to

---

53. WEHMEIER 100–101

54. 1 Kings 21.10 & 13; Job 1.5 & 11; 2.5 & 9; Psalm 10.3

express what he has done, which is the direct antonym of the Piel of קלל.<sup>(55)</sup> It is "...an euphemism deliberately substituted for its direct antithesis, viz. the most fearful form of curse such as it were a sin even to mention in direct terms."<sup>(56)</sup> It is by reference to Exodus 22.27 that the antithesis is established. "You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people." [RSV.28] "revile" = תִּקְלֵל, and "curse" = תֵּאָר. God cannot be cursed. The use of אָר for the pronouncement of an imprecation requires that God carry out the intention of the curse and God cannot logically be called upon to act against himself.<sup>(57)</sup> The king, however, can be cursed, as the second half of the verse in Exodus makes plain, hence the prohibition.

There is one special example of the use of בָּרַךְ in praise of God. In 2 Chronicles 20.26 "they assembled in the Valley of Beracah [עֵמֶק בְּרָכָה], for there they blessed the LORD; therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of Beracah [עֵמֶק בְּרָכָה] to this day" The Valley of Beracah, or the Valley of Blessing, is identified with Khirbet Berekut and Wadi Berekut, both near Tekoa.<sup>(58)</sup> The Valley has got its name from the fact that here the people blessed or praised God.<sup>(59)</sup>

The content of the blessing none the less, consistently with so many

---

55. MITCHELL 161

56. HEMPEL 97-99; BRICHTO 170-172; WEHMEIER 165-166; SCHOTTROFF 165 et al; BURNEY 247

57. MITCHELL 161-164

58. see WILLIAMSON 300

59. WEHMEIER 163

"2 C 20,26 steht ein ätiologisches Interesse im Vordergrund. Der Name 'emäq b<sup>e</sup>rākā wird mit dem Hinweis erklärt, an diesem Ort hätten die Israeliten Jahwe "gesegnet". Das meint nach chronistischem Verständnis, dass sie hier ein Loblied gesungen hätten."



other places in the Old Testament, is unforeseen wealth, the reward for trusting that Yahweh would achieve for Jehoshaphat the needed victory. "When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take the spoil from them, they found cattle in great numbers, goods, clothing, and precious things, which they took for themselves until they could carry no more. They were three days in taking spoil, it was so much [20.25]." The praise of the people is their response to the unexpected bounty received from the hand of God.

### 6.3 People blessing people

Surprisingly few of the references to human beings blessing other human beings are straightforward acts of well-wishing. There are occasions of greeting and leave-taking, with or without a gift. There are times when the ברכה is simply a gift. On one specific occasion it is the gift of a child. ברך is used to express thanks and praise and is often the recognition of the favoured status of the person blessed. It is uttered by a variety of people. The kings pronounce blessing acting as priests within the cultus. Blessing in one notable instance is the cancellation of a curse.

#### 6.3.1 Greeting and Leave-taking

The blessing pronounced by the reapers in Ruth 2.4 [וַיֹּאמְרוּ יְבָרְכְּךָ]

יְהוָה ] is a response to **יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם**, "The LORD be with you".(60) A similar harvest greeting and response is found in Psalm 129.8. The salutation is a general form of well-wishing, although in the context of the harvest it has the added weight of a special occasion. Blessing-greeting is appropriate because the crops are being gathered.

On some occasions when blessing has the quality of greeting it also contains an element of congratulation, as when the courtiers congratulate David that Solomon has been anointed to take his place [1 Kings 1.47]. Such an act on their part implies their readiness to give allegiance to Solomon. In this sense at least the lesser is able to enrich the greater and more powerful.

The giving of allegiance is also a feature of the story of Jehu's encounter with Jehonadab, the Rechabite. Jehu greets him [יְבִרְכֵנִי] 2 Kings 10.15] and asks: "Is your heart true to my heart as mine is to yours?" There is in the blessing-greeting of Jehu an interrogative note.(61) When Jehonadab gives him his hand, the world at large recognizes his approval of the course of action on which Jehu has embarked. "A handclasp denoted friendship, confirmation of a promise or an oath of allegiance to a new king. The latter meaning is understood here, for Jehonadab in associating himself with Jehu was giving a sign of allegiance to the one who had established himself on

---

60. see also Judges 6.12, the story of the angel's encounter with Gideon. "The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor." The indicative rather than the optative sense is required to make Gideon's response meaningful. "Pray, sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this befallen us [6.13]?"

61. FAHLGREN 195

the throne."(62) When Toi, king of Hamath, sends his son Joram to congratulate David on what he has done in defeating Hadadezer he also sends a large present to express the fact that he is on David's side [2 Samuel 8.9-14]. Offering the gift is an act of homage. God has given David military victories and consequently great quantities of gold, silver and bronze. David's fame is spread abroad and subjugated peoples will pay him tribute. Yahweh has blessed him indeed. Abigail, the wife of Nabal, is acting astutely when she sends a large gift of provisions for David's troops [הַבִּרְכָּה הַזֹּאת]. In spite of her foolish husband's political miscalculation in opting for Saul, she is declaring that they are on David's side really. The gift is in fact the payment of tribute [1 Samuel 25]. Abigail is trying to repair the damage done by her husband.

When Joshua dismisses [וַיְבָרֶכֶם] the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh to their newly apportioned territory [Joshua 22], the blessing is a simple leave-taking. Although they take away with them great wealth this is not so much a gift as their entitlement, their share of the communal property. When David dismisses Absalom [2 Samuel 13.35] and when he parts from Barzillai [2 Samuel 19.40] [in both instances וַיְבָרֶכְהוּ], although the circumstances of the parting in the two cases are very different, they are both straightforwardly leave-taking.

### 6.3.2 Blessing as Gift

"Give me a present [תְּנֵה-לִי בְרָכָה]: since you have set me in the land

---

62. G.H. JONES 468

see also PEDERSEN Eid 62. MONTGOMERY 410 & GRAY 505



of the Negeb, give me also springs of water [Joshua 15.19; see also Judges 1.15]." Achsah recognizes that her father Caleb has given her and her husband Othniel land. They now need water. The possession of Debir would be of dubious value without it. The request for בִּרְכָה is linked with the fertility which water brings. After the sack of Ziklag a present [בִּרְכָה - 1 Samuel 30.26] is sent to the elders of Judah, a part of the spoil. It expresses David's gratitude for their past support and will no doubt in a large measure ensure their continuing support. Their friendship will serve him well in the future, when he lays claim to their allegiance.(63) Naaman the Syrian sends to Elisha a gift [בִּרְכָה - 2 Kings 5.15] in gratitude for being cured of his leprosy, although this gift is not accepted. Elisha makes it plain that Naaman was cured as God's free gift and that there are no strings attached. That it is God who makes the gift is also clear from the account of Eli's dealings with Elkanah and Hannah [1 Samuel 2]. Eli blesses Hannah on her yearly visit to Samuel and she bears three more sons and two daughters. Blessing in her case is God's gift of children, "the LORD give you children... [v.28]."

### 6.3.3 Blessing as thanksgiving and praise

When Naomi blesses the one who has taken notice of Ruth she does not know his identity. She therefore wishes blessing upon him [יְהִי מִפִּירְךָ - Ruth 2.19].(64) When she discovers that their benefactor is Boaz she acknowledges that he is indeed blessed of Yahweh [בָּרַךְ הוּא - v.20]. The expression לִיהֲנֶה is not meant to emphasize that

---

63. McKANE 171

64. WEHMEIER 115

"Nach Rt 2,19 wünscht Naemi dem Unbekannten, der Ruth so freundlich begegnet ist, er möge ein bārūk sein."

Yahweh is the source of blessing but rather to stress the fact that the one who is blessed belongs to Yahweh.(65) Similarly when Boaz speaks of Ruth [Ruth 3.10] as בְּרוּכָה אַתָּה לַיהוָה, he is not expressing a wish that she may be blessed [as RSV]. He is recognizing her worthiness. "You are [obviously] blessed in the sight of Yahweh, my daughter."(66) The blessing is a recognition of her part in the covenant people. When Saul greets Samuel [1 Samuel 15.13] with the words בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה לַיהוָה he is acknowledging him as someone on whom Yahweh's favour rests. It is not optative as translated by RSV. Even the case of the Ziphites makes perfectly good sense when interpreted along these lines [1 Samuel 23.21]. They are בְּרוּכִים לַיהוָה. The wise course of action they have taken in coming to Saul is from Saul's perspective evidence that they are party to the counsels of Yahweh. They are on God's side in supporting the legitimate king. When David sends messengers to the people of Jabesh-gilead to thank them for their piety in burying Saul, the fact that they have done so is evidence that they are already blessed of Yahweh. They are בְּרֻכִּים לַיהוָה. (67) All those who are blessed לַיהוָה are praised for what they are.(68)

Joab's blessing of David is an expression of gratitude for allowing Absalom to return to the court [2 Samuel 14.22] and the blessing of the people on the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem [Nehemiah 11.2] is an expression of admiration and thankfulness for their readiness to accept something, which by implication, they would

---

65. WEHMEIER 131

66. WEHMEIER 113

67. PLASSMANN 46-47

68. 1 Samuel 26.25 [בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה בְּנֵי דָוִד] must also in context be translated as a declaration that David is the possessor or bearer of blessing. see PLASSMANN 95

rather not have done.

#### 6.3.4 Blessing as well-wishing

It is clear that in the early days of the monarchy the king had a priestly function. When David brings up the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem "he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts" [2 Samuel 6.19=1 Chronicles 16.2]. At the dedication of the Temple Solomon too blessed the assembled congregation [1 Kings 8.14 & 55]. In return the people bless Solomon [1 Kings 8.66]. In 1 Chronicles 23.13 the duties of the priesthood are laid down. They are authorized לְבָרֵךְ בְּשֵׁמוֹ עֶזְרָא-עוֹלָם [see also 2 Chronicles 30.27]. Whether from the mouth of king or priest, blessing is always "in the name of Yahweh". In all these cases the specific content of blessing is not mentioned. It must be understood in a general sense as a wish or prayer for the prosperity and well-being of the people over whom it is pronounced.

#### 6.3.5 Special cases

Judges 17 tells the story of an unnamed Israelite mother who is robbed of eleven hundred pieces of silver. She pronounces a solemn curse upon the thief. Her son Micah reveals that he is the one who has taken it. The immediate response of the mother is בָּרַךְ בְּנִי לֵיהִנֶּה. The blessing is a swift cancellation of a conditional curse. Willy Schottroff considers the curse to have been a legal expedient for identifying the thief. The blessing, however, protects not only the thief for whom the curse is annulled but also the speaker of the curse



on whose head it could rebound.(69)

In 2 Samuel 21.3 we find the curious expression **וּבְרַכּוּ אֶת־יְהוָה**. When famine fell upon the land David enquired of Yahweh what the cause might be. He learned that there was blood-guilt on Saul and his house because he had put to death Gibeonites who lived in a covenant/treaty relationship with Israel. David therefore asks: "How shall I make expiation, that you may bless the heritage of the LORD?" The Gibeonites ask for the death of seven members of Saul's household to make atonement and to cover the guilt. Their request is granted and the famine comes to an end. When the blood-guilt is expiated the land regains its growing-power. "The heritage of the LORD" can only be the people of Israel and Judah. The question put by David to the Gibeonites therefore means: "What must I do to get you to recognize once again your place in God's covenant people?"

Finally, there is the case of 2 Kings 18.31 [**עֲשׂוּ־אִתִּי בְרִכָּה**].(70) Sennacherib has been threatening Judah for some time. He exacts tribute and then besieges the city of Jerusalem accusing Hezekiah of making common cause with Egypt. Sennacherib's envoys demand the city's surrender. They shout to the defenders to come out and make their **בְּרִכָּה** with them. In spite of the many translations of this verse the general meaning of it is clear. The inhabitants of Jerusalem are to leave their posts and surrender. They will then make a treaty together, albeit a vassal treaty, for the Assyrians intend to deport the leaders and potential leaders as they have done in other places.

---

69. SCHOTTROFF 195 note 1

70. See also Isaiah 36.16

#### 6.4 Summary

The teaching of the historical writers is that Yahweh is the source of all blessing. Even when human beings bless each other the origin of the blessing is God himself. He is the one who in fact performs what is specified in the blessing. He it is who gives increase in numbers. He gives the gift of children, even to those who are considered barren, like the wife of Manoah and Hannah, the wife of Elkanah. He gives special endowment or particular gifts to individuals who are called to do specific tasks. It is God who supplies Samson's phenomenal strength.

Yahweh has given special symbols of his presence to make it clear that he is with his people to prosper them. He gave the Ark of the Covenant and subsequently the Temple as the place to which the people should turn with their requests. God has settled his favour on David and given him the blessing-assurance that his dynasty will endure on the throne of Israel.

Blessing can make curse ineffective or change the fortune of one with an ill-omened name. God cannot be cursed in the strict sense. His name may be reviled but since God alone could bring a curse into effect it is not possible to curse him. God, on the other hand, accepts the blessing of his name. He receives praise and thanksgiving. His worshippers offer their gratitude for every good thing they receive. They are even able to regard the removal of an enemy as a blessing from God and to give thanks for it. As well as using those who profess his name to call his people to worship, God also uses those who are not his followers, like Hiram and the Queen of Sheba, to summon his people to praise him. The number of his gifts is so great that it must be asked what the content of blessing is in each act of praise.

## Chapter 7

### The Theology of Blessing in the Psalms and the Wisdom Literature

#### 7.1 God blessing people

All three tenses of blessing occur in the Psalms and the Wisdom Literature. God has blessed; he continues to bless; he will bless in the future. The story of Job, for example, depends entirely on the fact that God has blessed Job abundantly in the past.

The scene is the heavenly court where Job is described as "a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil" [Job 1.8]. The number of his sons and daughters, the size of his work force and an enormous number of livestock appear to be linked with his right behaviour. Blessing in this story is material prosperity, a large family, good health and happiness. Job 1.10 reads: "thou hast blessed the work of his hands [מַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו בֵּרַכְתָּ]." The source of this tremendous wealth is Yahweh. It is Yahweh who has caused everything Job has done to prosper. As with the Psalmist: "God, our God, has blessed us [Psalm 67.6,7]." It is against this back-cloth that the drama of Job unfolds.

The Satan suggests that the only reason that Job is upright and fears God is because he benefits from such a posture. Yahweh has given him great wealth but "let Yahweh reverse His treatment, and Job will



certainly reverse his conduct, when piety no longer pays".(1) Satan's argument is that Job's blamelessness is ultimately a piece of intelligent self-interest. The whole course of the action depends on the thesis that "the trials of Job" are "to prove that it is indeed for *nothing* [my italics] that the hero of the story is "perfect and upright".(2)

There is, however, a clan solidarity both in prosperity and in misfortune which is personified in Job himself.(3) The death of Job's sons and daughters is passed over without reference to *their* fortune. It is only in so far as they figure in their *father's* story that they are of any account. Certainly the elaborate lengths to which Job himself goes to ensure that his children have not inadvertently offended Yahweh illustrate that he as head of the clan could put the situation right on their behalf. They are very much bound up with the blessing which Job has received from the hand of God.

When Job's fortunes are restored [Job 42.12 וַיְהִינָה בָרֶךְ אֶת־אַחֲרֵיתָא ] he receives double measure of everything he possessed before his trials at the hand of Satan. Job is given back his enormous wealth and his numerous family. This "...signals that he is again living in harmony with his cosmos", writes Habel.(4) Such an assertion, however, misses the whole point of the story. *In spite of appearances* Job has not forfeited his integrity. He has not in fact been living out of harmony with his world. The whole point about the suffering of Job is that it is totally unjust. In terms of the

---

1. DRIVER & GRAY 13

2. DHORME 7

3. SCHARBERT Solidarität 158-159

4. HABEL 580

contemporary understanding of what it is to be blessed, Job cannot, in his terrible plight, be blessed. He is accursed of God. The impact of the story depends precisely on the reader knowing that this is not true.

Scharbert sees part of the blessing in Job 42.12 as numerous progeny who live in solidarity with their father in his piety.(5) Psalm 133, which Hans Schmidt calls a "Grussgedicht" (6) because it was spoken on entry into the Temple precincts, describes blessing in similar terms as peace and harmony in the family. Old age surrounded by sons who live together peaceably and care for their parents is bliss.(7) However, the restoration of Job's wealth and influence in the community are less to do with his piety than with who God is. "These gifts at the end are gestures of grace, not rewards for virtue."(8) They signal that his trials are over.(9) There is no answer in the story as to why human beings suffer. Human suffering remains a mystery but within the parameters of the story the trial which God allows Job to undergo to demonstrate that he is good independently of his wealth must be brought to an end, for if it were not it would "merely be the expression of God's arbitrary malice".(10)

Job's good fortune included at the outset, and again in the resolution of the drama, good health. It is not stated whether he is handsome in

---

5. SCHARBERT Solidarität 236

"Der auf der Frömmigkeit ruhende Segen wirkt sich für den Vater in einer grossen Kinderschar aus, die natürlich selbst wieder aus Frommen besteht."

6. SCHMIDT TSK 103 1931

7. WEISER 785

8. ANDERSEN 294

9. ROWLEY 266

10. ROWLEY 267

appearance. In the case of the king, according to the Psalmist, he is not only the recipient of material gifts but he was also normally expected to be well-endowed physically, not just strong but also good-looking.(11) In Psalm 45 which is the one psalm which is not addressed to God but to the king, the poet, speaking to the king, says: "You are the fairest of the sons of men; grace is poured upon your lips; because [RSV therefore] God has blessed you for ever [verse 2]." Anderson goes as far as writing that "the King is recognized by his outward appearance and by his manner, and as such he is fit to receive God's blessing".(12) It may well be that a handsome face, physical strength and great personal charm (יָפִי) (13) were elements in the selection of Saul and David, but this cannot always have been so. The particular addressee of Psalm 45 may well have been considered favoured by God because he was in fact handsome and strong.(14)

11. WEISER 362

"The blessing of God, which is to remain with the ruler for ever, can be clearly recognized by the impressive beauty of the king's appearance and by his kind and gracious disposition..."

12. ANDERSON 348

13. LOFTHOUSE ZAW 51 1933 29-35

Lofthouse's examination of יָפִי, often translated as "grace", shows that it is a thoroughly secular term and not to be confused with St. Paul's understanding of God's grace in the New Testament.

14. RSV translates יָפִי-לֵךְ as "therefore". The sense conveyed is that God has blessed the king because he is handsome and charming! There is clearly a problem about translating יָפִי-לֵךְ. It is much more likely that the reverse is true. The king is handsome and charming because God has previously blessed him. The fact of his good looks and graceful speech is evidence that he has been blessed by God.

BDB offers the translation "therefore" but its explanation of the phrase is at variance with the translation. The Hebrew phrase is said to be used for "introducing the statement of a fact", i.e. "God has blessed you", in which case the conjunction "because" is a more satisfactory word and makes better sense in the context.

cf. DAHOOD I 271

"The king is handsome because God has favoured him."

also MITCHELL 74



There is, however, no guarantee that the successor in an hereditary dynasty will be so endowed, except by the flattery of court poets!

God's people have experienced blessing in the past and he blesses them in the present, "for thou dost bless the righteous, O LORD [כִּי־אַתָּה תְּבַרֵּךְ צְדִיק יְהוָה] [Psalm 5.12] ." In Psalm 5 blessing is the outflowing of God's favour [רַצוֹן]. It is not synonymous with it, as Anderson claims.<sup>(15)</sup> God's favour is the source of blessing. Like God's covenant love [חֶסֶדֶךָ Psalm 5.7], with which in this psalm it is more obviously synonymous, God's favour is the reason why he blesses the righteous,<sup>(16)</sup> the content of it being protection from the attacks of their enemies. The nature of God's favour and his covenant love is corporate, which is probably the reason why it is so easy for the psalmist to switch backwards and forwards between the praise or lament of an individual person and the praise or lament of the whole nation.

The well-being of the people is closely tied to the well-being of the king כִּי־תִקְדָּמְנוּ בְּרִכּוֹת מֶלֶךְ [Psalm 21.4]. The king in Psalm 21 is not only personally blessed but also a mediator of blessing. He is, according to Plassmann, "the embodiment" of a divinely sent propitious force.<sup>(17)</sup> He is, writes Fahlgren, a mediator of blessing for his people, because blessing is shared "nahezu automatisch" within the community

15. ANDERSON 86

16. MITCHELL 167

"Many verses [i.e. including this one] explicitly tie God's blessing activity to his love for or favor toward man..."

17. PLASSMANN 106

see also HEMPEL 38

"Wer von Jahve gesegnet ist, wird selbst zum Segen [Gen.12<sup>2</sup>;vgl. Jub.2<sup>23,32</sup>]; ein König, der auf Jahve vertraut, ist »zum Segen für allezeit eingesetzt« [Ps 21<sup>7</sup>]."

of common interest.(18) Anderson is right. "The Israelite king receives God's favour or blessings not only for himself but he is also the means whereby God brings peace, prosperity and fruitfulness upon the whole land and all its people."(19) There is, however, no warrant in this context for claiming that the king's name [be it David or another] was used in blessing.(20) The king is a representative person who when blessed by God [i.e. being the recipient of God's gifts] shares these good things with his people. When he is protected from his enemies the population at large lives in security.

God Most High keeps the king in his steadfast love [דָּוִד] [Psalm 21.7]. So, also in God's steadfast love towards his people he has delivered them from all kinds of trouble. Whereas he turns rivers into deserts and fruitful land into a salty waste because of the wickedness of its inhabitants [Psalm 107.33-34], he does quite the reverse for the hungry. They are his special care. For them he turns deserts into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water. "By his blessing they multiply greatly [וַיַּבְרַכֵּם וַיַּרְבּוּ מְאֹד] [Psalm 107.38]". As the

#### 18. FAHLGREN

Of "eine b<sup>e</sup>rākā" he writes: "Ein jeder, der in Verbindung mit ihr tritt und so ein bārūk wird, ist damit auch eine b<sup>e</sup>rākā für seine Umgebung. Deshalb heisst es in der Verheissung an Abraham nicht nur: »Ich will dich segnen [ʿābārækkā], sondern auch »und du sollst ein Segen [b<sup>e</sup>rākā] werden« und »durch dich sollen gesegnet werden alle Geschlechter auf Erden« [Gen. 12:2,3]. Deshalb wird vom Könige, der neben dem Stammvater vor allen anderen ein Vermittler von Segen sein soll, gesagt: »Du kommst ihm entgegen mit dem besten Gaben [birkōt tōb], --- und du lässt ihn zum Segen [b<sup>e</sup>rākōt] werden ewiglich« [Ps. 21:4,7]." 192-193

"Nachdem der König selbst die besten Gaben erhalten hat, ist er künftig ein Vermittler solcher Gaben für sein Volk." 192

#### 19. ANDERSON 181

#### 20. MITCHELL 60 footnote 18

contra WEHMEIER, who insists on translating verse 7:

"...denn du machtest seinen Namen für immer zum Segensspruch." 78

blessing assures the fertility of the land, so also the curse produces barrenness.

The presence of Yahweh is experienced in many ways. Psalm 147 has the feel of having recently experienced his presence as defender of the city, for one cause of praise is that "he strengthens the bars of your gates; he blesses your sons within you". "Your sons within you" are undoubtedly the citizens of Jerusalem, probably the post-exilic community [cf. verse 2].(21) "Blessing your sons" carries the notion of making them strong to withstand the enemy. "The peace which the city enjoys under God's protection, the vitality of the nation and the yield of the earth are for the members of the cult community the visible proofs of the grace and power of their God."(22)

In Proverbs 3.33 the sage says that "the LORD's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the abode of the righteous [וְנִיחָה צְדִיקִים וְכִלְיוֹן רְשָׁעִים]." His purpose is didactic. It is instruction for the young which McKane puts under the heading of "neighbourliness and circumspection"(23) and is part of the motivation indicated for the student's behaviour.(24) God bestows benefits upon his pious follower.

It is interesting to note that in this verse neither blessing nor curse is enacted through the power of the spoken word. No formulae are pronounced. Blessing and curse are built in to the environment. They are constant conditions. They flow naturally from human conduct. Wickedness will entail the curse of God, whereas piety will ensure his

---

21. ANDERSON 947; MITCHELL 75

22. WEISER 835

23. McKANE 299

24. McKANE 300



blessing.(25) Mitchell regards Proverbs 3.33 as a summary of the teaching of the Wisdom literature concerning blessing and cursing.(26) An enormous problem of theodicy is raised by such a view. The importance of the "house" or "home" in the Wisdom literature is, however, paramount. "The blessings of wife, children and property are basic, and the *bayit* is a crucial area of personal relationships. Only if this base is secure can a man consolidate his reputation further afield in the community."(27)

McKane identifies all three references to blessing in Proverbs 10 [verses 6,7,22] as expressive of a moralistic Yahwistic piety, according to which "it is the best possible world for the righteous and the worst possible for the wicked, and everything is to be explained by the circumstance that Yahweh has made it in this way."(28) This McKane calls rather misleadingly a *doctrine of theodicy* by which he means "that God enforces a moral order in relation to individuals by rewarding the righteous man and punishing the wicked one".(29) It is that very claim which in fact demands a justification of the ways of God to the human race, however presumptuous that may seem. To assert that God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked is the precise proposition which requires explanation in the light of the

---

25. MITCHELL 45

See also WEHMEIER 140

"Wie *m<sup>e</sup>ērā* das sichtbar gegenwärtige Verderben meint, so ist das Segnen die Kraft Gottes, die sich im gesamten Lebensreich des Frommen [der "Wohnung"] lebensfördernd auswirkt."

and also BRICHTO where he writes of the curse as "the operating curse, or spell" 114

26. MITCHELL 166

27. McKANE 302

28. McKANE 421

29. McKANE 420

observable fact that the righteous are often poor and the wicked often seen to prosper, certainly in terms of this world's goods. Why is this so? The wise men teach that בְּרִכּוֹת לְרֹאשׁ צַדִּיק [Proverbs 10.6] and בְּרִכַּת יְהוָה הִיא תַעֲשִׂיר [10.22].

This is even extended beyond the grave [10.7 זֵכֶר צַדִּיק לְבִרְכָּה]. When there was no promise of significant life after death to have numerous offspring, and more particularly sons, was very important indeed. "...the survival of a man's *name* represented a kind of prolongation of his life..."(30) The good leave behind a good reputation. They will be remembered as examples of blessedness and presumably thereby encourage others to be righteous, whereas the wicked will be remembered as a warning of the consequences of evil.(31)

However, some movement is made towards recognizing the problem of theodicy posed by this whole position. Proverbs 10.2 says: "Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death." There are the beginnings of a distinction between the wealth of the righteous and the riches of the wicked. "It matters how a man acquires his wealth, and wealth by itself is not a title to dignity and influence. If it is the expression of greed, then it is vulgarity and an indication of a monstrous defect of character which disqualifies a person from earning the respect of the community and exercising a weighty influence on its affairs."(32) The question must always be asked why this person is rich, for it is claimed that ill-gotten gain has its own entail, whilst wealth deriving from God's blessing is

---

30. WHYBRAY 62; McKANE 422-423

31. MITCHELL 59-60

32. McKANE 421

"unalloyed".(33) This thought goes some way to modifying the bald statement in verse 15 that "a rich man's wealth is his strong city". It is not enough to place reliance upon the possession of an abundance of this world's goods. To be complete, happiness in wealth depends upon the recognition that God is the source of it. It remains true generally in Proverbs that wealth itself is seen as God's gift,(34) but there are occasional glimpses of the transience and ambiguity of earthly possessions. Wealth is a blessing in the measure that it is received as from the hands of God and is experienced as "gift".(35) There is paradoxically at the same time a kind of work ethic for much of the thrust of the teacher of wisdom's instruction is an exhortation to solid labour [cf. Proverbs 6.6-11, "Go to the ant, O sluggard..."].

Whereas Proverbs 10.7 was concerned with the post-mortem reputation of the righteous individual, Proverbs 11.11 says that "by the blessing of the upright a city is exalted" [בְּבִרְכַּת יְשָׁרִים תָּרוּם]. It is claimed that civil prosperity is related to moral goodness,(36) this "righteousness" being measured by the relationship of the people to God and their behaviour to one another.(37) Blessing is not just a matter of speech but of deed as well.(38)

It is, however, by no means clear who blesses whom. The teacher of wisdom would have no doubt that God is the source of blessing. None

33. WHYBRAY 64; McKANE 422

34. KIDNER picks up the fact that there is an emphatic pronoun [אֵי] in the Hebrew which is acknowledged in the Greek text, αὐτὴ πλουτίζει. "The Heb. adds an emphatic pronoun [as in AV,RV]: 'it makes rich' - i.e. nothing else does." 85

35. WEHMEIER 84 & 226

36. TOY 226

37. WEHMEIER 226

38. WEHMEIER 227



the less Proverbs 11.11 might mean that when Yahweh causes the righteous to prosper everyone in the city shares in their good fortune. It might mean that when the righteous call down blessing on their fellow citizens there is mutual benefit. Certainly the prayer of blessing does not just yield good for those blessed but benefits the pronouncer of blessing too.(39) It might mean that those who recognize God as the source of the good fortune of the blessed show thereby that they themselves have a right scale of values. A fourth possibility is that the recipients of help "bless" the righteous, i.e. thank them, for the resources that they have made available.(40)

Furthermore, the mutuality of blessing is made abundantly clear in 11.25,26. The man who gives liberally [נֶפֶשׁ-בְּרָכָה, literally, "a soul of blessing"] is himself enriched. There are reciprocal benefits. McKane states this as a general principle "that there is harmony between enlightened self-interest and the common good".(41) For this view to hold good, however, verse 25 must be taken together with verse 26. Verse 25 is one of the few verses where there is no antithetical parallelism. Taken alone it does not require any implication of *mutual* benefit, for the phrase נֶפֶשׁ-בְּרָכָה, translated in the RSV as "a liberal man", might equally well be translated "a person of blessing", i.e. "a person who has received divine favour" (42) or "the recipient of divine favour". That such is person is himself or herself

---

39. KIDNER 91

40. PLASSMANN 135

41. McKANE 433

42. WHYBRAY 69

PLASSMANN 107

"It is on account of such liberality that one becomes deserving of the fond designation נֶפֶשׁ-בְּרָכָה ["a liberal soul"; Prov.11,25]."

See also WEHMEIER 73

enriched is clear, but that does not in itself require that this blessing extend to others. On the other hand, "one who waters" who "will himself be watered" does lead naturally to the translation "a liberal man" in the first half of the verse and imply mutual benefit. Proverbs 11.26 presupposes a situation of famine. Withholding grain held in store at such a time would be a terrible, cynical act, presumably with the intention of forcing high prices to rise even higher, unmoved by the people's suffering.<sup>(43)</sup> The mutuality of the situation is expressed in that grain is put on the market and the people "bless" the one who has made it available. The blessing on one side is, concretely and specifically, grain. On the other it is gratitude to the merchant [in Wehmeier's terms a "Segensspruch"].<sup>(44)</sup>

God's future enactment of blessing is secure in the minds of his people because of his past faithfulness. There is widespread agreement that Psalm 24 presupposes a festal procession.<sup>(45)</sup> The recipients of blessing in this case are those who participate in the cult. Blessing will not, however, result merely because the pilgrims have taken part in the procession. Nor does the context permit the view that they come merely out of self-interest, although the pilgrims may well have served as encouragement to others to be like them.<sup>(46)</sup> Only those who have "clean hands and a pure heart", who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully may draw near the holy place. Being blessed has an ethical dimension. The pilgrims' deeds and

---

43. KIDNER 94

44. WEHMEIER 97

45. MOWINCKEL Psalmenstudien V 130

"Der Segenswunsch empfängt den Festzug vor den Toren des Tempels oder auf dem Tempelplatz..."

also KIDNER 113 et al.

46. MOWINCKEL Psalmenstudien V 19

motives are important. So also is their relationship with God and their neighbour. Yahweh will bless those who trust him [Psalm 115.12.13]. He will bless those who have a bountiful eye [טוב-עֵין - Proverbs 22.9], a generous or benevolent disposition with a practical concern for the poor. Blessing is Yahweh's reward for generosity. Giving brings recompense from God himself. That they are on the right path will be demonstrated by the blessing they receive. In terms of Psalm 24, God, out of the earth's fulness, will reward them and vindicate them.

The blessing to which Psalm 37.22 points is as specific and concrete as anything to be found in the narrative sections of the Old Testament. In this case the upright man will possess land as the reward of his righteousness, whereas the wicked will be "cut off". It is, however, hard to distinguish between the righteous man and the righteous nation.<sup>(47)</sup> Presumably the people will inherit the land if they are obedient to God's will. Psalm 112 too opens with a beatitude introduced by the word אֲשֶׁר־ in which happiness is linked with keeping God's commandments.<sup>(48)</sup> The passive form of the verb refers to God indirectly [cf. Proverbs 22.9] but there is no doubt that he is considered to be the origin of the blessing.<sup>(49)</sup> The context makes it clear that "the generation of the upright" [דֹּר יִשְׁרָיִם] does not refer to the descendants of righteous people but to those within contemporary society who keep God's commands. The wicked look on

---

47. see Proverbs 24.25 with its concern for the impartiality of justice. "Society blesses those who bless it and curses those who curse it. This just another way of expressing the conviction that concern for the community's true weal coincides with the best interests of the individual." McKANE 573

48. MITCHELL 166

49. WEHMEIER 225

MITCHELL 51



enviously and see how the righteous are honoured [112.9-10]. The righteous are a group of people living in the midst of their fellows. They receive benefits from God in direct consequence of their good behaviour.(50)

The special place of Jerusalem in all this is spelled out in Psalm 132. Yahweh has chosen Mount Zion as his dwelling-place. Everything related to her will prosper because of Yahweh's election of her. His blessing will guarantee her well-being. "God does not promise to bless because of Israel's obedience, but simply because of his favor toward her - he chose her [*bḥr*, v. 13, as in Deut.7:7] simply because he desired her [v 14b]."(51) Jerusalem is God's dwelling-place and it is from there that he will bless his people. The fact that blessing rests upon those who fear Yahweh is stated at the beginning of Psalm 128 by means of the *יִרְאָה יְהוָה*-formula. Those who fear the Lord [*יִרְאָה יְהוָה*] will be blessed because their wives will produce many children [128.3]. The prosperity of the individual is, however, again bound up with the prosperity of Zion [128.5,6]. "Where the fear of God constitutes the foundation of domestic peace, there the peace of the whole nation is firmly warranted."(52) The priests in the Temple mediate the blessing. They do not themselves dispense it.(53) *נְשָׁלוֹם עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל*, the final words of Psalm 128, sum up all that is meant by blessing and prosperity.

---

50. MITCHELL 54 note 15

51. MITCHELL 61

52. WEISER 769

53. WEHMEIER 147

"Da Gott selbst "von Zion her" segnet, meint auch diese Redeweise offenbar, dass die Priester den Segen Jahwes vermitteln, ihn aber nicht selbst spenden."

## 7.2 People blessing God

### 7.2.1 Calling upon God to bless

It is the nature of a hymn book that it must provide appropriate categories of hymns to give expression to a wide range of moods. Psalms, like their modern counterparts, whilst composed against a specific background and for a specific purpose, have usually retained their place in the Psalter because of their very capacity for being used by people in very different circumstances but feeling something of the same emotions. Indeed two worshippers may use the same psalm at precisely the same time and in the same surroundings and be giving expression to very different experiences of God and the world. The headings to the Psalms, whilst they may retain a notional connection with a particular historical event or context, should consequently not be taken too seriously.<sup>(54)</sup>

Psalm 3 is the first of the psalms to have a superscription: "A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son". There is only slender internal evidence for the psalm being a prayer of the reigning monarch in the face of the threat of surrounding armies, whether from within the people of Israel or from the surrounding nations. There is even less evidence that it was David making this plea to Yahweh for protection and still less that it refers specifically to the time of

---

54. For a contrary view see Brevard S. CHILDS  
Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture SCM Press 520-522

Absalom's rebellion.(55) Whilst it is an appealing thesis there is also no adequate indication within the structure of the psalm to support Hans Schmidt's contention that the Temple has become a kind of court and that the psalm is a protestation of innocence on the part of someone unjustly accused, who therefore appeals to God for vindication.(56) Nor is there any textual evidence requiring emendation of the text of verse 8a in the interests of providing a better balance between the two halves of the verse.(57) The whole psalm stands in its own right giving expression to the feeling of being hemmed in on every side, which, because of its very lack of specificity, is the better suited within the liturgy to describe the experience of many different people. A generalized plea for deliverance allows worshippers to supply their own specific content. לִיהוָה הִישׁוּעָה עַל-עַמּוֹ [3.8]. בְּרִכְתּוֹ.

Typically psalms of lament have three elements, [1] a statement of grievance, lament or petition, [2] an indication that the petition has been heard, and [3] a vow of praise. Psalm 28 has these three constituent elements. The psalmist makes his plea [28.1-5].(58) There is "a shout of praise" [28.6a] and the assurance that the prayer has been heard [28.6b].(59) Then [28.9] there is a swift transition from individual to corporate petition. The psalmist has a great sense of his solidarity with the people. "He concludes his personal affirmation of faith in God by vowing that he will praise him with a thanksgiving.

---

55. see WEISER 94-95

56. H. SCHMIDT BZAW 49 1928

57. ANDERSON 75

58. There is no real internal evidence in the psalm that it is "a hymn of thanksgiving for the recovery from near-mortal illness". DAHOOD 172

59. MITCHELL 150-151



What he has experienced does not, however, belong exclusively to him as a personal possession. Being a member of the community of the people of God [28.9 *וְיָבֹרֵךְ אֶת־נַחֲלָתָךְ*], he lives in the fellowship of faith and from that fellowship, which is here manifested in the cult; just as, on the other hand, the fellowship of faith feeds on the strength and experience of faith of its individual members."(60)

That the psalms must be general in expression in order to allow individual suppliants to supply the content of their plea, need not prevent the actual petition from being full-blooded. In Psalm 109 there is nothing mealy-mouthed about the feelings expressed. It is a rounded condemnation of the worshipper's enemies. "This entire Psalm is a protestation of the righteousness of the psalmist, a prayer for vindication and release from his miseries; a condemnation of his accusers and enemies, and invocation of dire misfortunes upon them."(61) Whether the long tirade in 109.6-19 is the psalmist's expression of venom towards his enemies or a quotation of their attacks upon him does not matter for our purposes. Blessing and curse have visible consequences. They are deeds and not just words.(62) Asking for blessing seeks a practical outcome, a change in the circumstances in which the petitioner lives. It finds physical and concrete expression in the lives of those whom Yahweh has blessed.

### 7.2.2 People undertaking to bless God

---

60. WEISER 258

MITCHELL 119

61. BRICHTO 127

62. WEHMEIER 171

"Nicht das Sprechen von Segensformeln ist dann gemeint, sondern sein Tun, das anderen nützt."

Human beings make a vow of praise to God in anticipation of his response to their prayers for a variety of things. Psalm 26 is, however, almost an undertaking to make an act of praise in spite of everything. After a lengthy protestation that he has done nothing worthy of punishment the psalmist makes his plea: "Redeem me, and be gracious to me... in the great congregation I will bless the LORD [26.12]. In Psalm 34 on the other hand Mowinckel believes that we are listening specifically to someone restored from illness who has a direct sense of being rescued by God.(63) Anyone similarly afflicted is called to join the psalmist in giving praise to God.(64) "I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth." The parallelism of blessing and praise establishes their substantial identity.

Trust in God is the theme of Psalm 63, which begins with a statement of the psalmist's faith in the Lord. "Many psalmists consider long life as the chief evidence of God's favour, but this one can say, "Thy steadfast love is better than life". In other words, the Covenant relation with God is superior to mere biological existence."(65) The vow of praise in this case precedes the petition for the punishment of those who threaten his well-being and interestingly it is followed by an indication of the posture of praise. "I will lift up my hands and call on thy name [63.4b]."

---

63. MOWINCKEL 125

"These psalms are "als Dank[opfer]psalmen eines geretteten und geheilten Kranken aufzufassen. Richtig ist aber, dass die Dankpsalmen sich nicht nur an Gott, sondern auch an die versammelte Gemeinde wenden, und dass sie als Nebenzweck eine Belehrung der anderen Menschen haben..."

64. MITCHELL 140

65. RHODES 98

"The dead do not praise the LORD, nor do any that go down into silence. But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the LORD! [Psalm 115.18]. In this undertaking to praise God some have seen the beginnings of a belief in a life after death. "The dead do not praise the LORD..." is consistent with the dismal picture of Sheol found elsewhere in the Old Testament but the vow of praise, even with the addition of "for evermore", does not give permission to say too much about the life beyond the grave. LXX makes a specific contrast, which has some merit, by adding οἱ ζῶντες. "We the living will bless the LORD."

As is usual in what is a psalm of declarative praise, in Psalm 145 the writer describes extensively the deeds of Yahweh. The promise to bless him is an undertaking to offer praise and thanksgiving. He is praised for what he is. There is especial mention of his kingship and his mighty acts. The psalmist writes of his provision of food for all his people but in particular of his care for "those who are bowed down". "...the fundamental idea which pervades the whole psalm is... the everlasting praise of the 'name' [nature] of God, who has revealed himself in all his majesty and unsearchable sublimity."(66) Once again, as Wehmeier makes clear, the "name" is a synonym for Yahweh, which is used to emphasize the saving presence and power of God.(67)

### 7.2.3 Summons to bless God

Men and women are called upon to praise God and to give thanks to him in a number of places:

---

66. WEISER 827

67. WEHMEIER 175



[בָּרַכּוּ/בָּרְכוּ] Psalms 66.8; 68.27; 96.2; 100.4; 103.20-22; 104.1,35; 133.1,2; 135.19,20; [וַיְבָרֶךְ] 145.21; [בָּרַכּוּ נַפְשֵׁי אֲתֵי-יְהוָה] 103.1,2; [יְהִי] 103.1,2; [שֵׁם יְהוָה מְבָרָךְ] Job 1.11; Psalm 113.2. It is in fact not just the task of a select group to offer worship and adoration to Israel's God. Nor is there only one way of doing it. "...the imperative [בָּרַכּוּ אֲתֵי-יְהוָה] normally does not evoke any standard response. The imperative is intended to evoke an attitude of praise, rather than a *bārûk* or other formula."<sup>(68)</sup> Conscious of the presence and activity of God in everything, God's people, the Jews, are called upon to live the whole of their life in a spirit of worship.

In exhorting others to worship and praise there is often a recital of Yahweh's mighty deeds but not invariably so.<sup>(69)</sup> There is no statement of what God has done in Psalm 134, simply a call to worship, whereas in Psalm 135 there is a lengthy account of God's acts in history. Sometimes there is a specific reason why Yahweh should be blessed, as in Psalm 68 where God is described as crushing Israel's enemies. The worship of God should not be limited to Israel alone. Yahweh is superior to the gods of the nations. They too are summoned to bless him [Psalm 66.8 & 96.1-13]. The invitation is even extended to angels and the hosts of heaven [Psalm 103.20]. God is to be praised not only because of specific deeds but also for who he is [Psalm 145].

However, one constant refrain is the call to worship Yahweh because of his steadfast love [חַסְדּוֹ]. He has remained loyal to his covenant [Psalm 66.20]. In the Jubilate all lands are summoned to worship "for the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures for ever, and his

---

68. MITCHELL 141

69. The imperatives in Psalm 104.1 & 35 are a simple *inclusio*. They

faithfulness to all generations" [Psalm 100.5]. God's steadfast love is the source of the psalmist's confidence and gives impetus for his whole-hearted praise of God [Psalm 103.8,17]. This God is judge of all the earth and can be trusted to deal with all nations even-handedly. "He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth [Psalm 96.13]."

Israel's God is to be praised because he has a special concern for the poor and the oppressed [Psalm 103.1-6]. "...the LORD God who is seated on high... raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes... [Psalm 113.5-8]. The reversal of the fortunes of the oppressed is reminiscent of the Magnificat and the Beatitudes. Not only is the God of Israel the powerful Creator, transcendent in his glory but also a God who takes account of the downtrodden and the despised, so much so that Job can summon others to worship even in the midst of terrible misfortune, from his own particular "ash heap" [Job 1.21].

The expression **יְהִי שֵׁם יְהוָה מְבֹרָךְ** [Job 1.21 & Psalm 113.2] deserves special attention. "The name of the LORD" "stands for the revealed character of God".(70) Just as Plassmann may be right to protest that the translation of **בָּרוּךְ** by "praised" is too weak a rendering, it may also be right to insist on a distinction between **יְהוָה בָּרוּךְ** or **בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה** and **יְהִי שֵׁם יְהוָה מְבֹרָךְ**. Anderson, like many a commentator, regards the latter phrase as a synonym for "Praise the

LORD!"(71) It is, however, a serious question whether any language retains two or more words alongside each other which are absolutely identical in meaning. That there is overlap of meaning is certain, but total identity is another matter. Such an observation may well explain Plassmann's *feeling* that "praise" does not quite do justice to the richer tone of the word "blessing".(72) Such an observation lies at the heart of the difference between Mitchell's and Wehmeier's discussion of בָּרַךְ and מְבָרַךְ.

Mitchell identifies Psalm 113 as a "descriptive psalm of praise". He distinguishes the descriptive from the declarative psalm of praise in terms of its motivation. "...the descriptive psalms of praise are doxological."(73) He then writes: "The *měbōrak* formula is synonymous with the *bārûk* formulas in the other descriptive psalms of praise.(74) It is at this point that it is worth asking the question whether or not parallel words or expressions, whilst having substantial identity or overlap, do retain elements of fine distinction.

Mitchell at an earlier point in his discussion of Psalm 113.2 acknowledges that the Pual מְבָרַךְ is passive in meaning and that יְהִי is jussive.(75) It is inherently more likely that Wehmeier is right in assigning the Pual forms of blessing to the "Wunschform".(76) They are an expression of a wish or hope or desire, that Yahweh may be blessed. בָּרַךְ יְהוָה is the exclamation of praise asserting that Yahweh is blessed; the formula is used to acknowledge a fact. יְהִי שֵׁם

---

71. ANDERSON 780  
 72. PLASSMANN 141  
 73. MITCHELL 160  
 74. MITCHELL 160  
 75. MITCHELL 148  
 76. WEHMEIER 174



יְהוָה מְבָרַךְ is an exhortation to the people to use the בָּרוּךְ-formula and other forms of praise to extol the name of their God, to describe doxologically what he is really like. "Let the name of the LORD be praised!" It is the psalmist's wish or desire that it should be so.

#### 7.2.4 The בָּרוּךְ-formulas

[בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה] Psalms 66.20; 68.36

[בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה] Psalm 68.20

[וּבָרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹדוֹ לְעוֹלָם] Psalm 72.19

[בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה] Psalms 89.53; 124.6; 135.21

[בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל] 41.13; 72.18; 106.48

[בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה כִּי...] Psalms 28.6; 31.21

[בָּרוּךְ [יְהוָה] צוּרִי] Psalms 18.47; 144.1

[בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה] Psalm 119.12

Much that has been written about the vow of praise is also true of its expression. בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה is uttered in worship and praise of God in widely different contexts, by different people with very different intentions. None of that need be repeated. The context in which it is uttered remains none the less important to determine which nuance of the word בָּרוּךְ predominates in the particular circumstances in which it is pronounced. For example, בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה כִּי... goes on to specify the occasion of praise or thanks. "...he has heard the voice of my supplication [Psalm 28.6]. "...he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when... [Psalm 31.21]" Even without כִּי the context demonstrates why Yahweh is blessed.

It is not necessary to dwell on the variations on בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה, except to indicate that a formula like בָּרוּךְ [יְהוָה] צוּרִי [Psalm 18.47 & 144.1]

may well be used because the rock-like qualities of Yahweh are what are needed in that psalmist's situation. The important thing to determine is whether *בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה* is indicative or optative.

First of all it must be acknowledged that the phrase *בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה* is a many-layered expression which contains within itself emotions which are variously described in English. It includes wonder, praise and honour and thanksgiving. There is no real difficulty in identifying its mood when God is being thanked for what he has done for the person addressing him. ...*בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה כִּי...* "Thank you, Yahweh, because/for you have..." Although it would be a pale translation of a word which contains so many other tones, gratitude is present continuous.

The situation is not so straightforward when wonder, praise and honour are to the forefront of the worshipper's mind. RSV persistently translates *בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה* as "Blessed be..." when it cannot be understood to be a summons to praise [see above the discussion of the imperative *בְּרַכּוּ* and of the jussive with pual passive *יְהוָה מְבֹרָךְ*] and when an optative, a wish, would have to have a very precise meaning. The optative might conceivably mean: "May blessing formulas be addressed to Yahweh." It is, however, not very likely that the *בָּרוּךְ*-formula would be used simply to enjoin others to use a *בָּרוּךְ*-formula. Such an explanation has a built-in air of redundancy. *בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה* might on the other hand mean: "May there be people who will bless Yahweh." An optative would *not* be appropriate in respect of who Yahweh is, since human praise can add nothing to his being in himself but it might not be inappropriate to think that he could be enriched in terms of the relationship with him voluntarily accepted by the worshipper. To bless Yahweh would mean making an act of commitment to him which increases his stock of followers.

However, even if this latter position is accepted, it being possible for an inferior to bless a superior,(77) the expression still contains within it a layer of assertion of what Yahweh is in himself. בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה makes a declaration of the nature and being of God, whose content is often determined in context. "Blessed is the LORD, the God of Israel [i.e. worthy of worship and praise, honour and gratitude], who alone does wondrous things. Blessed is his glorious name for ever... [Psalm 72.18,19]" "Blessed is the Lord [אֱלֹהֵינוּ], who daily bears us up; God is our salvation." That is, he is one who sustains and brings salvation [Psalm 68.19].(78)

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה in Psalm 119.12 [contra RSV] can only be translated in the indicative. "Blessed art thou, O LORD; teach me thy statutes!" On the six occasions when בָּרוּךְ is used with human beings (79) each case can be translated "Blessed are you..." indicating that the situation of the person or persons addressed is a favoured one. Waldemar Janzen's analysis of the uses of אֲשֶׁרִי make it clear that אֲשֶׁרִי is the cry of an observer of someone else's good fortune.(80) It is never addressed to God because its expression is often tinged with envy (81) and it comes to replace the use of בָּרוּךְ with human beings. It offers congratulation and presupposes the existence of happiness already achieved.(82) The growing use of בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה in addressing

77. It is clearly possible in human terms for an inferior to bless a superior. It does, however, normally involve the giving of allegiance or submission to the one blessed.

78. The translation "Reich an Segen" is Wehmeier's way of showing that בָּרוּךְ is declarative.

79. Ruth 3.10; 1 Samuel 15.13; 23.21; 25.33; 26.25; 2 Samuel 2.5

80. JANZEN "'ashrê in the Old Testament"

81. JANZEN 225

82. LIPINSKI "Macarismes et psaumes de Congratulation"



God, of which Psalm 119.12 & 1 Chronicles 29.10 are the only examples in the Hebrew canon, makes explicit the indicative mood already present in the long-established use of  $\text{בָּרַךְ}$  alone.

One further observation needs to be made. The  $\text{בָּרַךְ}$ -formula is often an exclamation of praise standing alone [Psalm 89.52 et al]. Its content is not filled out. It might well be best to translate it on such occasions simply as "Blessed LORD", without any further indication of the mood. This would allow the expression to retain its layers of meaning without being obliged to make distinctions which were first made by the translators of the Septuagint by choosing between  $\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\lambda\omicron\gamma\eta\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$  and  $\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\lambda\omicron\gamma\eta\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\varsigma$ . It might also help in English if on occasion  $\text{בָּרַךְ}$  were translated as a vocative: "Blessed Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things! Blessed is his glorious name for ever..."

### 7.3 People blessing people

The psalmists ask God's blessing for a variety of things. For his people they ask strength and peace [29.11]; they ask for the gift of children [115.15]. In words reminiscent of Numbers 6 God is asked to "make his face shine upon us" [67.2]. As for the king, let him be famous and all nations recognize that he is blessed [72.17]. There is a strong link with the Temple and its priesthood. Blessing will be pronounced by the priests "from Zion" [118.26; 128.5; 134.3].

Blessing is wishing others prosperity but includes the ordinary everyday benefits of life. The wise man prays for happiness for the one who is faithful to the wife of his youth [Proverbs 5.18]. It includes the thanks offered by the poor to Job in the days of his former

wealth. Job protests that in spite of everything that has befallen him he cared for the poor and the fatherless. He was a valued counsellor, respected amongst his people, honoured by all. "The blessing of him who was about to perish came upon me [Job 29.13]." Those in dire straits had reason to express gratitude for Job's kindness and generous gifts [also Job 31.20].

#### 7.4 Special uses of בָּרַךְ

##### 7.4.1 Euphemism

Job wonders whether his children in the midst of their feasting have inadvertently "cursed God" [Job 1.5; see also 1.11 & 2.5,9]. The Hebrew is בִּרְכָּהוּ. This use of בָּרַךְ is euphemistic.<sup>(83)</sup> Some think it a scribal emendation, a refusal to use a curse-word with reference to God.<sup>(84)</sup> This is contested by Mitchell. There is no need to explain the euphemism by reference to the scribes. בָּרַךְ can mean the very opposite of what is normally understood by blessing. It can mean "to blaspheme".<sup>(85)</sup> It is the opposite of "to worship".

BDB suggests that it gains its antithetical meaning "from the greeting in departing, saying adieu to, taking leave of".<sup>(86)</sup> Edgar Gibson builds a whole theory on this sense of "taking leave" coming to the conclusion that בָּרַךְ must here be understood to mean "renounce". Job's worry is that his sons may unintentionally have sinned "and renounced God in

---

83. WEHMEIER 165

84. DRIVER & GRAY 8

85. MITCHELL 161-162; cf. 1 Kings 21; see BLANK 1950 83

86. BDB 139a

their hearts". In this Gibson is following the translators of the RV.(87) However, "farewells are always spoken as a sincere expression of affection and respect between persons on good terms".(88) It is consequently not easy to imagine how something so beneficent in intention should come to bear the opposite meaning.

BDB's own preferred explanation of the antithetical use of  $\text{ברך}$  is that it is "rather a blessing overdone and so really a curse as in vulgar English as well as in the Semitic cognates".(89) Such an explanation may well be true but, as Plassmann observes in relation to Job's wife's exhortation to him to "curse God and die [2.9]", the tone of voice in which the word  $\text{ברך}$  was used would be all important. "...in conversation the tone in which such expressions are uttered would of itself sufficiently indicate whether an euphemism is intended or not."(90) Although the explanation is attractive, it must remain in the area of speculation, for whether the blessing is "overdone" can only be ascertained by the pious imagination. That it is an euphemism for "curse" in Job 1.5 is, however, beyond doubt. "...the word actually acquires the opposite meaning when the context determines."(91)

The text of Psalm 10.3 has caused translators great difficulty because it too appears to use the blessing word  $\text{ברך}$  with a pejorative meaning. LXX tries to simplify the problem by transferring the second part of the verse [ $\text{παρώξυνεν τὸν κύριον ὁ ἀμαρτωλός}$ ] to verse 4 [9.25 in LXX]. In this it is followed by Anderson who

---

87. GIBSON 3

88. MITCHELL 161-162; see also ROWLEY 30

89. BDB 139a

90. PLASSMANN 143

91. ANDERSON 81



translates 10.3: "...and it is himself that the unscrupulous profiteer blesses." (92) Such an approach to the textual difficulties, however, destroys the poetical balance of the verse. The other varied attempts to deal with the undoubted problem retain the balance of the verse but in their attempted solutions divide in three basic ways. The first group claims that the use of בִּרְכָּה is an euphemism to avoid putting a curse-word alongside the name of Yahweh. The second seeks to emend the text so as to make something other than Yahweh the object of the verb with the derogatory meaning. The third retains the blessing-word but offers an explanation of its use in terms of an antithesis between the two parts of verse 3b.

Those who take the view that the use of בִּרְכָּה here is euphemistic form the largest party. Pedersen, Mitchell and Murtonen belong to this group. (93) The basis of the claim is a comparison of Psalm 10.3 with the euphemistic use of the word in Job and in Kings. As in those cases, however, the idea that Yahweh may be cursed is to overstate the antithesis. Yahweh is the only one who can inflict the penalty of a curse. No one can impose the consequences of a curse on God himself but God's name can be blasphemed - which is certainly what Job wonders. Have his sons inadvertently blasphemed the name of God?

The attempts to emend this text are numerous. (94) None of them quite works. The most felicitous solution to the problem of Psalm 10.3 is the way taken by Plassmann and Brichto. They resist the idea that בִּרְכָּה is

---

92. ANDERSON 114

93. MURTONEN 171; MITCHELL 163; PEDERSEN Eid 92; see also BDB 139a

94. see NEB; KIDNER 71; WEHMEIER 163-164; WEISER 147; DAHOOD I 61 & 62

euphemistic. Plassmann suggests: "and the covetous has blessed [but inwardly] despised Yahweh." (95) Brichto renders it: "when the rapacious blesses [=thinks that all is well, congratulates] he is holding YHWH in contempt." (96) They are right that the use of בָּרַךְ in this context does not inevitably require an euphemistic understanding. The normal meaning of בָּרַךְ fits well. That the person of wealth should bless Yahweh is not particularly strange. What is implied is an expression of praise which is either a conventional offering of thanks to God lacking in sincerity, or a cynical mouthing of words without any belief in their significance. Brichto believes Psalm 10.4 to be the explicating verse. The speaker does not believe that there will be any calling to account because there is no God. בָּרַךְ has therefore its usual meaning and is no euphemism. The greedy or rapacious man mouths praise of God and denies his words by his attitude to wealth and its acquisition. "In arrogance the wicked hotly pursues the poor [v.2]." "...the wicked boasts of the desires of his heart, and the man greedy for gain" praises [but, by his very mind-set and conduct in the process] spurns Yahweh, for although the presence of this world's goods is normally a sign of God's good pleasure, it is a matter of considerable importance how wealth is acquired [see Proverbs 10.2 & 22].

"He who blesses his neighbour with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing [Proverbs 27.14]." Blessing is here understood to be a greeting, a normal, everyday salutation. Those who retain the whole text regard it as a statement concerning good manners. Brichto, for example, paraphrases in order to capture what

---

95. PLASSMANN 141

96. BRICHTO 170 [note]

he considers to be the real flavour of it. "Anyone who favors his fellow early in the morning with a shouted salutation will find himself charged with boorish/churlish conduct." (97) There is, however, a good case for omitting the phrase "rising early in the morning" as a gloss on "with a loud voice". (98) The saying would then not be concerned with advising people against shouting at a time when their neighbours have not yet collected their wits. It would be a denunciation of "a forced heartiness, a boisterous but hollow camaraderie" which is mere "affectation of friendship". (99) One may only conjecture as to why anyone might greet someone else in an excessively loud manner - perhaps to mask fear or insecurity in the face of another who is experienced as a threat. Whatever may be the precise motivation, it is apparent that even the everyday habit of greeting has to be done properly if it is to have the desired effect of cementing relationships. (100)

#### 7.4.2 Blessing and the wicked

Wealth is not always to be attributed to God's blessing. Psalm 49 forcibly reminds the rich that there are no pockets in a shroud. They cannot take their riches into Sheol. (101) If they continue to think that they have done well and to congratulate themselves on their success, they are living life on a false premise. (102) "The man who imagines that he can heedlessly pass over the ultimately decisive reality, that is, over God, bases his life on a delusion in that he deceives himself

---

97. BRICHTO 191

98. TOY 488; OESTERLEY 242

99. McKANE 619

100. MITCHELL 174

101. RHODES 84

102. PLASSMANN 138



about the true circumstances of his existence, no matter how much other people may count him to be a lucky man...."(103) The construction **נִפְשׁוֹ יְבָרֶכֶה** is literally "he blesses his soul" [Psalm 49.19]. He turns in upon himself instead of turning towards God in gratitude for the prosperity he enjoys. He does not receive his wealth as a gift. He believes it to be the result of his labour. He still has to learn that "man cannot abide in his pomp, he is like the beasts that perish [49.20]". Material wealth does not bring happiness without reference to its source or the means of its acquisition [Proverbs 20.21]. Happiness involves knowing that the bounty enjoyed comes from God. It cannot be achieved by fraudulent means.

The Psalms have a great deal to say about those who have shown themselves to be the opponents of righteousness. There are enemies of the nation. There are the wicked within the nation. There are those who seem friendly but in their hearts harbour evil intentions. In Psalm 62 this latter group is exposed. A contrast is drawn between what is said with the lips [**בְּפִי יְבָרְכוּ**] and what is harboured in the heart. The psalmist is, however, safe from his adversaries because he trusts in God. "They can no longer deceive him by the friendliness of the good wishes which are always upon their lips when they talk to him."(104) He has no scruples about laying all kinds of invective upon his enemy. "He loved to curse; let curses come on him! He did not like blessing; may it be far from him [Psalm 109.17]!" Those who hate Zion are compared to thin strands of grass clinging to life on roof-tops [Psalm 129.8]. Whereas for those on whom God's blessing rests there is joyful harvest greeting, for these there is only silence.

---

103. WEISER 391

104. WEISER 449

The sage has a special word for "those who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers [Proverbs 30.11]. He denounces the lack of respect shown to parents in his generation. Children owe to their parents not just occasional expressions of blessing but a respectful bearing in the whole of their life together.(105) Blessing is a total orientation of life which bears fruit in good relationships.

#### 7.4.3 A Problem Verse

The "Valley of Baca" in Psalm 84.7 is not a known geographical location. The verse reads: עֲבְרֵי בְעֵמֶק הַבָּקָה מִצֵּן יְשִׁיתוּהָ [LXX 83.7 ἐν τῇ κοιλάδι τοῦ κλαυθμῶνος εἰς τόπον, ὅν ἔθετο, καὶ γὰρ εὐλογίας δώσει ὁ νομοθετῶν. RSV 84.6 "As they go though the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools."] The context requires it to be a barren place through which pilgrims pass on their way to Jerusalem. The similarity of the word Baca [בָּקָה] to the verb "to weep" [בָּקָה] requires the translation "the valley of weeping" [LXX ἐν τῇ κοιλάδι τοῦ κλαυθμῶνος]. The tears make the valley "a place of springs" [מִצֵּן], symbolising a change from sorrow to joy. Presumably the tears of the pilgrims – whether tears of joyful anticipation of the visit to the holy place or tears of anguish does not matter(106) – transform this arid place and make beautiful things grow.

The wide variety of translations is clear evidence of the linguistic problems. "Baca" is thought by some to be the balsam-tree [also בָּקָה],

---

105. WEHMEIER 159

106. KIDNER 305; MITCHELL 76

i.e. this is the Vale of Balsams. The connection with "weeping" [as in LXX] is that this tree "exudes or 'weeps' some substance, in which case there may be a play on words here, which the 'Valley of Weeping' picks up".(107) This is, however, one further remove from the explanation of the Septuagint's ἐν τῇ κοιλάδι τοῦ κλαυθμῶνος and is not a better explanation than the one above.

The LXX also has ὁ νομοθετῶν for the Hebrew מוֹרֶה translated in RSV "the early rain". There is no doubt of the second meaning of מוֹרֶה as "teacher", which is the origin of the LXX translation. The context none the less requires "[early or autumn] rain". There is no need either to read מוֹרֶה as "a divine appellative parsing as hiphil participle of yōreh, "to cast, to rain".(108) Even if such a translation were to be accepted it would make no effective difference to the meaning of the verse, for the psalmist would have been in no doubt that God was the source of the rain to enliven the land. Nor is it necessary to read "pools" [as in RSV] for "blessings". It is impossible to translate a pun from one language into another but the play on words is unmistakable. What is further clear, if the word-play is accepted, is the connection between "blessing" and "water" which brings fertility to otherwise barren places, a condition which it is not hard to allegorize in terms of the experience of the pilgrims.(109)

## 7.5 Summary

Talk of blessing is only possible because of the certainty that Israel

---

107. KIDNER 305 footnote 1

108. DAHOOD II 281

109. RSV. Psalm 84.4,5,12. These verses do not contain the root בָּרַךְ. They all begin אֲשַׁבֵּחַ.



has of living within God's steadfast love [לִדְוִי]. The psalmists stress repeatedly that God keeps faith with them in every circumstance. Job is sure that God is to be praised even though he does not understand why he is suffering. The problem of justifying God in the light of the belief that his curse is on the wicked and his blessing on the righteous is considerable. However, although this problem emerges clearly in Job, the Psalms and Proverbs, there is the beginning of an answer when it is made clear that great riches are not necessarily a sign of God's blessing. The way in which wealth is amassed is important and in any case, to be a blessing, it must be received as a gift from God's hand.

In the Psalms and the Book of Proverbs there is a corporate solidarity both in prosperity and in misfortune. There is a mutuality about blessing which ensures that the one on whom it is pronounced is blessed and that the person who is the source of it is also enriched. The king as a representative person is himself blessed but he is also a mediator of blessing. Because it is the seat of government and because the Temple is situated on Mount Zion, there is great emphasis in the Psalms on the importance of Jerusalem as the focus of the spirituality of Israel and Judah. Blessing is pronounced by the priests from Zion but always in the name of Yahweh. God himself is worthy of worship and praise. He is to be blessed by his people.

## Chapter 8

### The Theology of Blessing in the Prophets

There are few places in the prophets where use is made of the root בֵּרַךְ. There are 15 references in Isaiah, 4 in Jeremiah, 7 in Ezekiel, 1 in Joel, 1 in Haggai, 2 in Zechariah, and 2 in Malachi.

#### 8.1 God blessing people

"In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth [בִּרְכָה בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ], whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people [בְּרוּךְ עַמִּי מִצְרַיִם - LXX Εὐλογημένος ὁ λαός μου ὁ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ], and Assyria [LXX καὶ ὁ ἐν Ασσυρίους] the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage [19.24-25]."

After recounting the terrible troubles to be visited upon the Egyptians the writer of Isaiah 19 describes the way in which they will turn to the worship of Yahweh. "...God's blessing no longer applies solely to Israel; the nations are also blessed through Israel." (1) "Israel my heritage [19.25]" still has an important position (2) in the new

---

1. KAISER 110

2. CHEYNE 122

"Hath blessed him] viz., each of the three countries. Obs. Israel, as the central point of 'blessing,' still retains a certain pre-eminence."

KISSANE takes an opposite view. 213

"It is doubtful if Israel's title ['My inheritance'] is intended to be more honourable than that of either Assyria or Egypt; the meaning is rather that all three will be equally God's chosen people."

The LXX takes the two verses to refer to Israel and to children of

confederation of nations, for the blessing in which the Egyptians and the Assyrians share is mediated through contact with Israel. "The divine blessing, the sole source of the life of God's people, will permeate the whole world of mankind, united in the worship of Yahweh, the living God." (3) All three together have been prepared for this task. The blessing given to Abraham belongs to Egypt and Assyria too. (4)

The context does not make it clear wherein this blessing lies except, of course, that it is to be found in a relationship with Yahweh. These nations are to be bearers of blessing to others because they are themselves blessed. There can be no doubt that the tense of the blessing is indicative. Yahweh has pronounced words of blessing and

Israel living in Egypt and Assyria.

3. HERBERT 126

WEHMEIER 87

"b<sup>e</sup>rākā umschreibt dann nicht den Vorgang des göttlichen Segenshandelns ["der Segen, mit dem Jahwe gesegnet hat"], sondern der Ausdruck bezeichnet die Bestimmung Israels : das Gottesvolk wirkt als heilschaffendes Ferment in der Völkerwelt."

PEDERSEN Eid 73

"Wenn es heisst, dass Abraham ein Segen und Glück [בְּרָכָה] werden solle, und dass die Leute sich durch ihn »segnen« oder »sich Glück verschaffen« sollen, dann bedeutet das soviel, dass er nicht nur selbst das Glück in sich tragen, sondern es auch auf andere ausstrahlen soll. Ebenso wird Israel nach Jes.19,24 einmal eine בְּרָכָה werden, indem es mächtig und stark wird."

It is rather that they become strong and powerful because they are blessed and not the contrary.

4. CHEYNE 122

"These three, Egypt, Assyria, Israel, have been divinely prepared to become a blessing within the earth ['within,' i.e., 'within the entire compass of,' not merely 'in the midst of' - blessing is to stream forth from them in all directions, comp. Gen.xii 2b,3b]."

KISSANE 213

"A blessing. cf.Gen.xii.2. The blessings promised to Israel in the time of the patriarchs will be bestowed on Egypt and Assyria."



blessed they are.(5)

Blessing is often found expressed in terms of abundant crops and an adequate provision of water but in Deutero-Isaiah [44.3] three things are set in parallel, water, spirit and blessing. **כִּי אֶצְקֶמֶם עַל-צִמָּא. וְנִזְלִים עַל-יְבֹשָׁה אֶצְקֶ רוּחִי עַל-זֶרְעָה וּבְרָכָתִי עַל-צִאֲצָאֶיהָ.** Consequently there are those who on the basis of this and kindred verses seek to establish the etymological link between blessing [בְּרָכָה] and water [בְּרִיחַ - a pool].(6) An etymological approach in this instance looks attractive. Be that as it may, there can be no doubt that the imagery is intended to convey the notion that the people will thrive. The underlying picture is of flourishing vegetation supported by abundant water. The outpouring of water produces lush growth. What is striking in this context is that the prophet sets the gift of God's spirit alongside the promise of water and blessing.

The outpouring of spirit and of blessing will lead the people of Israel to return to their first allegiance, to Yahweh, their God. Westermann writes : "Rūah then expresses 'the divine power which creates life in man and nature', as in Gen.2.7; Isa.32.15 and Ps.104.30; this is the only meaning which can make it parallel to b<sup>e</sup>rākā, blessing, which is used

---

##### 5. WEHMEIER 105

"Als Segensspruch im Munde Jahwes ist das - sehr späte - Heilswort Js 19,25 stilisiert; als Abschluss der weitausladenden Heilszusage an Aegypten und Assyrien [18-25] kann es nur assertorisch gemeint sein : "bārūk ist Aegypten, mein Volk, und Assyrien, das Werk meiner Hände, und Israel, mein Erbesitz"."

6. The LXX makes the verse refer to water given to those who travel through arid land rather than to the making fruitful of the land itself.

FAHLGREN 168-169, footnote 4 & 192-193, footnote 4

##### PLASSMANN 105

"So, too, is בְּרִיחַ employed in the O.T., e.g. in the sense of the divinely sent fructifying force, abiding in rain or showers..."

in its original sense of vitality or power which bestows fertility."(7) Mitchell takes, however, a slightly different view from Westermann, believing that "the meanings of *bĕrākā* and *rûah* transcend the notions of the "power which bestows fertility" and "the divine power which creates life in man and nature"...", for, whilst the imagery is certainly meant to indicate a future state of prosperity, the immediate effect of the outpouring of spirit and blessing from Yahweh "is that the people will return to the traditional faith and declare their loyalty to Yahweh".(8) Wehmeier, like Westermann, is in this context rightly criticised by Mitchell (9) for reaching the conclusion that spiritual gifts are nowhere in the Old Testament described as "blessings".(10) The parallelism between spirit and blessing shows spirit to be a gift of Yahweh as blessing is a gift of Yahweh. Just as Yahweh's gift of

---

7. WESTERMANN Isaiah 40-66 136

8. MITCHELL 56-57

9. MITCHELL 167

10. WEHMEIER 229-230

"Nach allen Schichten des AT besteht der Segen Gottes in konkreten irdischen Gütern, namentlich in der Kraft der Vermehrung und das Wachstum, im Reifen, Gedeihen und Gelingen in allen Lebensbereichen. "Geistliche" Gaben werden nirgendwo als "Segen" bezeichnet."

MITCHELL is, however, not quite fair to Wehmeier, for Wehmeier, perhaps slightly inconsistently with the conclusion quoted above, earlier in his treatise, offers a more spirit-related understanding of blessing. "Dass sich daneben schon ein stärker vergeistigtes Segensverständnis anbahnt, zeigt die Fortsetzung, die auf das "Wachsen" der Jahwe-Gemeinde durch das Hinzutreten von Proselyten anhebt." 77

Wehmeier does nevertheless claim too much in the context. Spiritual blessing is to belong to Yahweh. There is here no reference to other nations, except perhaps obliquely in the statement "and you are my witnesses" [44.8].

If this verse is indeed susceptible to a spiritual interpretation linking blessing with a right relationship with Yahweh, then it is an important bridge verse with the New Testament where the nature of Yahweh's blessing, his presence, is understood in terms of the gifts of the Spirit, love, joy, peace etc. rather than in terms of concrete, material

water yields fecundity in the barren desert, so Yahweh's spirit and Yahweh's blessing will revivify Israel and make them new.(11)

That blessing involves the fertility of the people as well as the fruitfulness of the land is also expressed by Deutero-Isaiah in 51.1-3. However, whereas the Genesis 12.1-3 & Genesis 17 passages contain promises to Abraham, Isaiah includes Sarah in his statement concerning God's past faithfulness. Reminding the exiles of the rock from which they were hewn and the quarry from which they were digged, in a particularly striking way, he recalls the barrenness and apparent hopelessness of the situation of Abraham and Sarah, from whom God brought into being a great nation. When God says : "I blessed him and made him many", (12) he implicitly guarantees that they will again be a great nation. "Isa 51:1-2 is concerned with demonstrating how God faithfully fulfills even his most unbelievable promises." (13) What is impossible in human terms is possible with God. (14) The reconstituted nation will enjoy another Eden [51.3]. The

---

prosperity. [see Wehmeier 230-231]

11. MITCHELL 167

GUILLET Thèmes Bibliques 245

12. see Kittel footnote for the pointing; reading with the Greek, Vulgate, Syriac and the Targum 'X] with both verbs.

LXX adds καὶ ἡγάπησά αὐτὸν presumably indicating a confusion of 22] [to be or become many] with 27X [to love].

13. MITCHELL 53

14. FAHLGREN 101-102

"Dies ist keine Unmöglichkeit. Unmögliches war es, Abraham, den Einsamen, zu einem grossen Volke zu machen. Aber auch dies hat Jahve getan. Das soll ein Beweis dafür sein, dass er um so viel leichter seinem gefangenen Volk eine Zukunft schaffen kann."

WEHMEIER 218-219

"Is 51,2 aktualisiert die Segensverheissung an Abraham für die Generation der Exilzeit ... Dt-Jesaja verkündigt damit: auch das dezimierte und in seinem Fortbestehen gefährdete Gottesvolk kann darauf vertrauen, dass Gott wieder schöpferisch handeln wird [das



blessing of Yahweh is for the exiles the promise of numerous progeny and a guarantee of their future well-being.

What Deutero-Isaiah has said about God's ability and intention to restore his people, which to the exiles must have seemed far from fulfilment, is heightened and developed by Trito-Isaiah. "Instead of your shame you shall have a double portion, instead of dishonor you shall rejoice in your lot; therefore in your land you shall possess a double portion; yours shall be everlasting joy [61.7]." Everybody who sees them will know "that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed יְהוָה בֵּרַךְ יְרַע בְּרַךְ יְהוָה [61.9]." The prophet in his vision of Israel's future with God sees for Israel a privileged position in relation to the peoples of the world.(15) God will deliver his chosen ones. Such will be the blessing that he will shower upon them that those who look upon Israel will desire it for themselves. For this reason this lofty vision has been described as a climax of the Old Testament.(16) It is a vision of a new heaven and a new earth [65.23].

The content of blessing is fertility and long life, well-being and peace. This state of peace is none of their achieving. It is God's gift. This wonderful idyll is God's making, the overflowing of his grace. Yahweh enters into that relationship with his people which he promised to Abraham.(17)

---

sagt in mythischer Sprache V.1b] und in einer Situation, in der menschlich nichts mehr zu hoffen ist, in der Gabe zahlreicher Nachkommenschaft seine Segensmacht erweisen wird."

15. WEHMEIER 221

16. WEHMEIER quoting FEUILLET, RSR 39, 1951 221

17. SCHARBERT Solidarität 229

"Wenn man wie die Erzväter zu Gott steht, dann wird dieser auf Grund der Verheissungen und des Bundes mit Abraham Gnade gewähren und den Segen aktualisieren, damit sie »ein Geschlecht von Gesegneten

In order to get the people to realise that God still has a purpose for them Trito-Isaiah speaks of a cluster of grapes which is not destroyed **כִּי בִרְכָה בּוֹ**. An incidental illustration is pushed too far by some commentators, who insist that here blessing equals "Wachstumskraft",<sup>(18)</sup> the power to make grow. Westermann is typical of many when he writes: "The proverb-like turn of phrase retains the oldest meaning of *b<sup>ḥ</sup>rākā*, blessing = power of giving increase."<sup>(19)</sup> Severed bunches of grapes do not normally grow! Even Pedersen's "the blessing is the life-power" is far too animistic in the context. "It is the blessing of the grape," he writes, "to contain juice, just as it is the blessing of the kneading-trough to be full of dough."<sup>(20)</sup> Surely the verse simply means that whilst there is still juice in the cluster of grapes it is not thrown away. In a similar fashion the whole nation will be preserved because of the remnant within it which has remained faithful to Yahweh.<sup>(21)</sup> Grapes are kept whilst there is something good in them. There is likewise reason to spare the people of Israel.

Even Mitchell who is resistant to the "Lebenskraft" interpretation of the older commentators goes over the top in his analysis of this verse. "Isa 65:8 describes the juice," he claims, "as a precious commodity magnanimously given by God and says that it would be a shame to throw away this valued fruit of nature."<sup>(22)</sup> He then goes on to write that "the blessing of grape juice is a natural component of

---

Jahwes sind und ihre Sprösslinge mit ihnen" [Jes 65,23]."

18. WEHMEIER 71

19. WESTERMANN Isaiah 40-66 404

MOWINCKEL Psalmenstudien V 5

20. PEDERSEN Israel I 182-183

21. MITCHELL 66

22. MITCHELL 66

creation and is a benefit available to all mankind, not just Israel".(23)  
 The simple illustration of why Israel will be spared has taken on a direction and force that the context cannot possibly support.

The prophet Jeremiah adds little to our understanding of blessing. Of the four references to the root בָּרַךְ in Jeremiah one [Jeremiah 17.7] is a Wisdom saying. Another will be dealt with under section 8.3 below. The third and the fourth, Jeremiah 3.15,19-25 & 4.1-4, form a continuous unit into which other material has been introduced.(24) This part of the prophet's teaching does pick up and restate Yahweh's intention to extend blessing to the nations through the agency of his chosen people.

Israel is summoned to repentance, to turn from idolatry. There is a call to inward cleansing and, in 3.4, a hint of the new covenant which Yahweh will make with his people. "...if their repentance is sincere, they can truly be his people again, and he can make good the promises made to their fathers."(25) By reason of their example other nations will turn to Yahweh their God.(26) If they will commit themselves to him, swearing "By the life of Yahweh (27) truly, justly and rightly, then nations will bless themselves in him, and in him congratulate themselves".(28)

There is beyond any shadow of a doubt a reference here to the promise of God to Abraham to make him a great nation so that in him

---

23. MITCHELL 66

24. BRIGHT 25

25. BRIGHT 25

26. FREEDMAN 26

27. see GREENBERG JBL 76 [1957] 34-39

28. HOLLADAY 62



other nations will be blessed.(29) In Jeremiah, however, the promise has been redirected. In spite of attempts to amend the text to make the reference specific to the people of Israel (30) there is no textual evidence to warrant any change. In fact, the verse makes very good sense as it stands. "What Jrm has done ... is to shift the focus of the promise to Abraham from Israel's glory to Yahweh's glory: if Israel is able to fulfill her calling given first to Abraham, by returning to Yahweh in integrity, then the nations of the world will bask in their good fortune under Yahweh."(31) The Hithpael is used to convey the idea that the nations will "bless themselves" in Yahweh (וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ) and make their boast or exult in him (וַיְבָרֵךְ יְהוָה לָנֶפֶשׁ). The reflexive form indicates that they will acknowledge that their prosperity stems from Yahweh just as his people Israel will once more thrive because they will again belong to him, following their act of penitence.(32)

However, although much that Jeremiah has to say relates to the future time when Israel will be restored, he knows that his vision of a new Jerusalem is not possible without the people's repentance. Much of his message concerns the devastation that will result from their failure to heed his warnings. God's judgement will fall upon them. Like Job [Job 3.3-12]), Jeremiah bewails the day of his birth. He has made his terrible proclamation and has been put in the stocks. In the absolute depth of despair he curses [by use of a negative blessing -

---

29. JUNKER 557

"Die Anspielung auf den Abrahamsseggen ist deutlich."

see WEHMEIER 181-182

30. see KITTEL footnote, reading בָּרַךְ and בָּרַךְ

MITCHELL 55-56, footnote 16

31. HOLLADAY 129

32. MITCHELL 57

"God uses Israel as a mediator of blessing in order to bless other nations and lead them to worship himself."

אֶל־יְהוָה בְּרוֹךְ] the day which saw his arrival in this world [Jeremiah 20.14]. "There is no adequate reason for supposing that actual personality was ascribed to time, so that it could be blessed or cursed. This is nothing more than a vehement way of regretting that he was ever born." (33) The day can only be blessed or cursed by consideration of whether what happened in it was beneficial or harmful to those who meet Jeremiah. Jeremiah himself obviously wishes that he did not have to be the constant bearer of bad news, announcing Yahweh's judgement upon his people.

The birth of a child is normally considered to be God's blessing. Therefore if the day had in fact been unblessed Jeremiah would not have been born at all. (34) He curses the day presumably because he is forbidden to curse God or his parents. (35) He even curses the messenger who brought to his father the news of his birth. The form of this cursing is clearly optative, although expressed in negative terms. (36) He cannot in fact change the past nor bring misfortune retrospectively upon the poor unsuspecting person who announced his birth. (37) The whole outpouring gives expression to his profound suffering. (38) It is not performative, except in the measure that it

33. FREEDMAN 139

34. WEHMEIER 115

"Wäre der Geburtstag "ohne Segen" gewesen, hätte es für den Neugeborenen keine Lebensmöglichkeit gegeben..."

35. MITCHELL 117

36. MITCHELL 114,116,156

"yěhî clearly identifies this form as an optative wish."

37. LXX: μή ἔστω ἐπευχτή, "Let it not be longed for" is a curious way of regretting a past event and of rendering אֶל־יְהוָה בְּרוֹךְ.

38. BRUN 16

"Ausserhalb des Eides scheint die Selbstverwünschung vor allem in der Form der Verfluchung des Geburtstages vorgekommen zu sein. Solche Verfluchung ist Ausdruck des tiefsten Leidens, das den Leidenden fast

gives release to his pent-up emotions.

It is always hazardous to make theology out of one verse of scripture. It is even more hazardous to do so when the exact form of the text is in dispute. Ezekiel 34.26 says **וְנָתַתִּי אוֹתָם וְסִבִּיבוֹת גְּבֻעָתִי בְּרָכָה** . LXX manages to remove the reference to **בְּרָכָה** in the first part of the verse altogether [*καὶ δώσω αὐτοὺς περικύκλῳ τοῦ ὄρους μου. καὶ δώσω τὸν ὑετὸν ὑμῶν, ὑετὸν εὐλογίας*]. If the Hebrew text is allowed to stand, the first reference to blessing in this verse must mean that the restored people, gathered in Jerusalem, with the holy hill of Zion at its centre, is the recipient of God's blessing.<sup>(39)</sup> This blessing cannot simply be contained by the people of Judah. "The force, abiding and propitious and dwelling visibly in a person or nation, is therefore diffusive of itself, affecting as it does whatever comes within its compass. Thus, in Ez.34,26, the places round about «Yahweh's hill» participate in its blessing [cf. Isaiah 19.24; Zechariah 8.13]."<sup>(40)</sup> This is the approach taken by RSV.

There is, however, a body of scholarly opinion exemplified by the suggested emendation of the text in Kittel <sup>(41)</sup> and followed amongst others by Eichrodt, which, like LXX,<sup>(42)</sup> removes the first reference

---

zur Verzweiflung treibt..."

39. MITCHELL 50 53 118

40. PLASSMANN 106-107

41. KITTEL footnote

"**וְנָתַתִּי אוֹתָם וְסִבִּיבוֹת גְּבֻעָתִי בְּרָכָה**"

42. WEHMEIER 89

"Der Umstand, dass LXX *b<sup>e</sup>rākā* anscheinend noch nicht gelesen hat, zeigt, dass es sich um eine späte Hinzufügung handelt."

ZIMMERLI II 210

"...on the basis of G, **בְּרָכָה** must surely be a secondary expansion.



to blessing altogether. Following this emendation 34.26 reads: "And I will give showers in due time and cause the rain to fall in its season, they shall be showers of blessing." (43) The Septuagint version does not, however, justify the extent of the change made by Kittel, Eichrodt and others. It speaks rather of settling the people "round my mountain" [περικύκλω τοῦ ὄρους μου] and giving them the rain which will ensure the fertility of the land. Nor does the fact that LXX does not contain the first reference to בִּרְכָּה mean inevitably that it was a late addition to the text as Wehmeier contends.

There can, however, be no doubt, in the light of 34.27, that the showers of blessing symbolise abundant harvests which will ensure the well-being of the people. (44) The fruitful rain brings increase to the earth and makes it fertile. It enables growth and prosperity, so much so that Fahlgren can write that all those rich gifts which Israel received as God's blessing derive from life-giving water. (45)

---

What remains may then tentatively, parallel to v 26b, be read with Bertholet [partly on the basis of Cornill] as אֶת הַרְבִּיבִים בְּעָתָם. There can be no possibility of certainty. The thought of the restoration and of the temple hill is certainly not original, however, between v 25 and v 26b."

43. EICHRODT 474

44. FISCH 234

45. FAHLGREN 168

"So können all die reichen Gaben, die Israel als *b<sup>e</sup>rākā* ersehnt, faktisch auf diese einzige Quelle, das alles befruchtende und lebenspendende Wasser zurückgeführt werden."

MOWINCKEL overstates the matter. 9

"...die Regengüsse tragen den Segen Jahwä's zur Erde herunter."

see WEHMEIER 72-73

"Aus diesem Nachsatz erhellt, wie die Wendung *gišmē b<sup>e</sup>rākā* gemeint ist : nicht um "gesegnete Regen(-güsse)" geht es, um Regen, der Gottes Segen empfangen hat, sondern um "segenspendende" Regengüsse, um Regen, der die Kraft des Wachstums und Gedeihens in sich schliesst."

Such a picture provides a great contrast with the destruction described by Joel. He paints a terrible picture of the Day of the Lord, the utter desolation which will mark its coming. It will not be anything to look forward to with longing. Yahweh's grim army will devastate everything in its path. "...the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; who can endure it [2.11]?" "Yet even now," says the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning...[2.12]" Yahweh utters a passionate call to repentance. He is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (וְרַב־חַסֵּד), and repents of evil [2.13]." His covenant love summons the people to turn back to him. There is still time, but everything now hinges on their penitence.

If the people turn back to God, "instead of scorched earth and barren desert, the forgiving God leaves behind "blessing", i.e., a condition that makes life possible, such as is granted when there is grain, new-wine, and olive-oil. Only this grant of life, which has to come from Yahweh himself, makes possible once again "meal-offerings and libations" for the covenant God as a sign of the community of salvation."(46) The penitence on which this gracious action of God now depends is not

---

46. WOLFF 50

MYERS 85

"The first sign of his forgiveness would be a blessing - the gift of food which the locusts had destroyed as the precursor of judgement still to come. The restoration of produce from the land would be a twofold blessing: food for the people and the means to provide cereal offerings and drink offerings as the recognition of their gratitude for God's forgiveness."

WEHMEIER 77

"Wenn wieder Huldigungsoffer und Giessspenden dargebracht werden können, so erwies sich darin, dass trotz der Katastrophe Wohlhabenheit und Fülle noch vorhanden sind, dass Gott nicht allen Besitz der Gemeinde zerstört, sondern einen Rest übriggelassen hat."

sorrow for specific acts of sin. It is a whole new re-orientation of life in response to the proclamation of God.(47) The people's apostasy has been so great that a whole new beginning is demanded if they are not to be "a reproach, a byword among the nations". Yahweh has, however, pity on his people and sends them "grain, wine, and oil [2.19]", so that they are satisfied.

Blessing is here "abundance or amassment [of something]".(48) There can be no doubt of the concrete, material nature of the blessing which Yahweh will leave behind if the people turn back to him. The provision of this bounty once again will supply all their needs, but it will also make possible the worship of Yahweh through grain-offerings and drink-offerings. Characteristically Yahweh himself provides those things which are necessary for his worship.

In Haggai blessing is once again seen in concrete, physical terms. Whereas the harvests have been far from satisfactory for the people after their return from exile, Yahweh promises that as soon as they begin the re-building of the Temple they will once again be blessed. The Temple symbolizes the presence of Yahweh with his people. He will appear there in his glory [Haggai 1.8]. His Spirit abides among them [2.5]. Temple, presence, glory, spirit, blessing, form a cluster of ideas which together constitute the well-being of God's people. But first they must rebuild the Temple.

---

47. WEHMEIER 220

"Nach Jl 2,12-14 ist denn auch die "Umkehr" des Volkes die Voraussetzung für das Segenshandeln Gottes, und zwar nicht im Sinne einer Abkehr von bestimmten sozialen, politischen oder kultischen Verfehlungen, sondern das ungeteilte Hinwendung zu Gott, im Hören auf sein Wort."

48. PLASSMANN 104



It is odd that the verb בִּרַךְ is used without an explicit object [מִן־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֲבָרְכָה].(49) There can, however, be no doubt that the RSV is right to supply "you", the implication being that the people will prosper once more from the moment that the first stone is laid in the foundation of the second Temple. Their harvests will again be good. Blessing is tied up with the re-building of God's house, which must not be allowed to lie in ruins whilst they live in their "paneled houses" [1.4].

In spite of their former desperate situation Judah will in contrast become a symbol of what it means to be fortunate, according to the writer of Zechariah 8. "And as you have been a byword of cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you and you shall be a blessing [וְהָיָה פֶּאֶשֶׁר הָיִיתֶם קְלָלָה בַּגּוֹיִם] [בֵּית יְהוּדָה וּבֵית יִשְׂרָאֵל בֵּן אוֹשִׁיעַ אֶתְכֶם וְהָיִיתֶם בְּרָכָה].

"Ye were a curse among the nations. This does not mean that they were a source or occasion of misfortune to their neighbours, but that the other nations, seeing their unfortunate condition, recognised in it the hand of Yahweh..." H.G. Mitchell believes that the other half of the antithesis must be interpreted in a similar fashion. "The fact that the Jews are to be the object of Yahweh's help makes it necessary, when he adds, *and ye shall be a blessing*, to understand this as meaning that they shall henceforth be blessed by him, and universally

---

49. PETERSEN 95

"This use of *brk* as a transitive verb without an explicit object is unusual. Of the seventeen occurrences of *brk* in the first-person common singular piel, this is the only one in which there is no object." LXX translates literally "εὐλογῆσω" and does not supply an object.

recognised as the special objects of divine favour..."(50) That the blessing and the curse come from Yahweh is beyond dispute, as in the Deuteronomic writings. The passage does also, however, bear the sense of the people of Israel being an example,(51) "one, who by virtue of punishment, has become a public example".(52) The RSV has "a byword of cursing", which as a translation is ambiguous enough to mean either that they are a true example of what it means to be cursed or that their name will be used in curse-formulae. This would require an understanding of the blessing which Yahweh will make them either to mean that people can understand what it is to be blessed by looking at Israel and Judah or that their names will be used by others to invoke blessing.

It is Joyce Baldwin who interprets the phrase "*and you shall be a blessing*" to mean that they will be "actively a blessing to the nations".(53) This is the line taken by Plassmann who believes that this passage should be understood in terms of Israel being "the embodiment of this divinely sent propitious force" which "is therefore diffusive of itself, affecting as it does whatever comes within its compass".(54) Plassmann's view is far too animistic but even Baldwin's position takes the matter too far. It is not necessary to believe that Yahweh's blessing of the people makes them mediators of his blessing to the nations. Rather the context explains the blessing upon Israel adequately in terms of Yahweh's goal being achieved by

---

50. H.G. MITCHELL 211

51. WEHMEIER 88

52. JONES 109

53. BALDWIN 153

54. PLASSMANN 106

re-establishing his people in prosperity in the land.(55) There is no question of their being a "source of blessing". They are "a proverbial example of someone who has been blessed".(56) In this context too, as in Haggai 2.19, this new prosperity is conceived in physical, material terms (57) and is linked to the people's renewed obedience to God's word and to the rebuilding of his house.

## 8.2 People blessing God

There is little use made of the root  $\text{בָּרַךְ}$  in the prophets to express praise or worship of God. Indeed, Isaiah 66.3, ["he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense [is] like him who blesses an idol"] has a very strong anti-cultic flavour about it.(58) By virtue of the fact that "heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool" all human religious activity is equated with idolatry. It can be worth nothing.(59) In 66.3 a number of words are used which have a cultic significance. None of the religious practices referred to is to be compared with the worship of the humble and contrite. In what is a typical prophetic denunciation of the kind found in Amos, the

---

55. see WEHMEIER 99

56. C.W. MITCHELL 59  
BRICHTO 196

57. MOWINCKEL 6

"Der Segen ist zunächst und vor allem das Verpflanzungsvermögen, die Zeugungskraft, die Fruchtbarkeit."

58. RSV has followed LXX by adding "like". MT makes good sense simply translating the parallelism, i.e. "he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense is the same one who blesses an idol."

59. WEHMEIER 164

"Der Abschnitt Js 66, 1-4 ist offenbar von einer kultfeindlichen Tendenz bestimmt, und zwar wehrt der Sprecher sich nicht nur gegen bestimmte Entartungserscheinungen oder synkretistische Gefahren, sondern er setzt, ausgehend von Gottes Weltüberlegenheit [v.1f], jede menschliche Religionsübung mit Götzenverehrung und Frevel gleich."



inadequacy of corrupt cultic worship is made clear. (60) In fact this is a unique use of the verb **כָּרַב**. Nowhere else does it require the translation "worship", as it does here, with reference to an idol. It appears to carry, in this specific context, the sense of "giving allegiance to" or "placing reliance upon" an idol. He who does not come to Yahweh in humility [66.2] is an idolater. Correct cultic practice is no substitute for true piety.

There is a further problem in relation to the second reference to **כָּרַב** in the prophets, namely in Ezekiel 3.12 [**כָּרַבְתִּי כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה**]. This short doxology is not universally acknowledged to be a part of the text. There are those who prefer to replace the word **כָּרַבְתִּי** by **קָרַבְתִּי** from the verb **קָרַב** [to rise]. Hence the RSV : "as the glory of the LORD arose from its place", assigning the words of doxology to a footnote.(61) There is, however, no textual support whatsoever for such a reading.(62) The text as it stands makes perfectly good sense.

It was normal to expect the appearing of God in the spectacular events of nature. "God appears amid storm and tempest, and disappears in the roar of a thunderstorm." (63) Eichrodt believes therefore that 3.13, with its reference to "the sound of the wings of the living creatures as they touched one another..." is "an explanatory gloss".(64) It links the natural phenomena with the worship of the heavenly court. Fisch too writes of this cry of praise: "blessed

---

60. MITCHELL 137

61. GREENBERG 61

"Hebrew *baruk*; conjecture *b<sup>e</sup>rum* "at the rising of".

KITTEL footnote "ל **קָרַבְתִּי**."

62. MITCHELL 160

63. EICHRODT 66

64. EICHRODT 61

be the glory of the LORD from His place. These words were presumably uttered by the celestial beings and heard by the prophet as he turns away from the scene."(65) Ezekiel has an incredible sense of being called of God to speak his word. He is quite overwhelmed by the experience he has been granted which includes a brief glimpse of the praise offered to God in heaven.

It must be recognised that the phrase *בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה* fits awkwardly into the verse.(66) It is probably best understood as an interjection of praise on the part of the prophet in the wake of the noise of an earthquake signifying the departure of Yahweh. Ezekiel acknowledges the glory of the God who has given him his task. It is a cry of wonder and amazement.

However, the cry "Blessed be the LORD, I have become rich" [*בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה וְאֶנְכִּי נִשְׁעָר*] in Zechariah 11.5 is heavily ironical.(67) The leaders of the people are pictured as shepherds who gain illicit wealth from their flock [cf. Hosea 12.7-9]. "Blessed be the LORD, I have become rich" [LXX has the first person plural "*πεπλουτήκαμεν*"]. The blessing is a spontaneous cry of praise to Yahweh, who is clearly regarded as the source of wealth. It is in fact hollow mockery. Yahweh does not approve of their activities. They are not the object of his favour.(68)

65. FISCH 19

66. WEHMEIER is not sure whether this cry of praise is original or not. 127

"Um eine spontane Rezitation der Doxologie im Munde des Propheten handelt es sich bei Ez.3,12, sofern der überlieferte Text ursprünglich ist..."

67. C.W.MITCHELL 154

68. BALDWIN 180

"Riches are no proof of the Lord's favour, least of all when they are obtained by fraud."

Possessing wealth does not indicate that God is on their side. It matters a great deal how wealth is acquired [cf 196,197-198 above]. It matters how it is used.

Wehmeier regards this verse as an example of the unthinking use of the name of God as a kind of oath.(69) Whether such be the case or not, implicit is the lingering belief that Yahweh is the source of wealth. The truth is, however, that the simple equation of wealth with the blessing of Yahweh is something that these predatory leaders will have to unlearn [cf 196 above].

Because of the ambiguity of the phrase "and I will curse your blessings" [וְאָרוֹתַי אֶת-בְּרִכּוֹתֵיכֶם], it is difficult to know whether to include Malachi 2.2 here or in section 8.3 below. The Levitical priests have been failing in their solemn duties. Yahweh will send a curse upon them and he will curse their blessings. Because of their sin his covenant with them will be ended.(70) It is not immediately clear what these "blessings" are. Murtonen offers three possibilities. "The present MT seems to mean gifts or sacrifices in general, either those that are given to the priests for themselves, or their gifts and sacrifices performed by them upon YHWH's altar. The hymns and songs of praise are not quite excluded, either."(71) The latter suggestion refers back to his discussion of Joel 2.14.

In spite of the fact that Wehmeier opts in the end for blessing as the

---

69. WEHMEIER 127

70. SCHARBERT Solidarität 235

"Der Levibund wird darum widerrufen. Nicht Jahwe hat ihn gebrochen, sondern die unfrohen Nachkommen eines frommen Ahnvaters. Jahwe entzieht ihnen die Verheissungen für immer (Mal 2 1-9)."

71. MURTONEN 174



increase of the land, his hesitancy in relationship to this verse is indicated by his translation which incorporates two possibilities. Blessing may here be agricultural produce or the pronouncement of priestly benediction.(72) Jones, on the other hand, is convinced that the blessings which God curses are "certainly more than the benedictions they pronounce".(73)

If, however, the whole context is taken into account the weight of the evidence is with Christopher Mitchell. God is the subject of the action and he has the power to override blessings and curses uttered by human beings, as is clearly seen from the Balaam episode in the book of Numbers.(74) He can override the benedictions pronounced by the priests. The whole setting is cultic and it is therefore intrinsically more likely that God is saying that he will not respond to their words of benediction. He will make their words ineffectual and worthless.(75) They "have turned aside from the way". They can no longer expect that God, the source of blessing, will respond to their declarations in his name.

### 8.3 People blessing people

"The LORD bless you, o habitation of righteousness, o holy hill" [Jeremiah 31.23 יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה נְוֵה־צֶדֶק הַר הַקֹּדֶשׁ]. "Habitation of righteousness, o holy hill" is a metonymy for the inhabitants of Jerusalem living according to God's law. Jeremiah describes a state of

---

72. WEHMEIER 220

"...ich verfluche eure(n) Segen(ungen)."

73. JONES 190

74. C.W. MITCHELL 175

75. C.W. MITCHELL 98

utter desolation. Yahweh will, however, restore his people. They will be able once again to pronounce words of blessing upon Jerusalem and upon mount Zion where their holy and righteous God dwells. They will be able to pray for its well-being and to thank God for the resultant prosperity, which will be based once more on the fruitfulness of the land, bringing relief to the weary.(76) Thanksgiving to God for the fruits of the earth spills over into sharing them with the poor and the needy [31.25].

Ezekiel 44.17-31 contains rules and regulations for the priesthood. Specifically, verses 28-31 lay down what the priests are to be given to provide for their food. Their needs are to be supplied so "that a blessing may rest upon your house" [לְהֵנִיחַ בְּרָכָה אֶל-בֵּיתְךָ].(77) Giving to those who by God's decree have no inheritance of their own brings its reward. The content of the blessing is not stated, but the context makes it clear that the well-being of the people generally - if "your house" is a collective singular - or the well-being of individual family-groups - if the plural is read - is linked to the maintenance of the priesthood. There is nothing in the context to suggest that the blessing derives from the priests themselves.(78) The blessing is God's, although it is possible that the very suggestion of blessing in relationship to the priesthood would call to mind the special position

---

76. MITCHELL 122

77. The Massoretic Text, the Vulgate and the Targum suggest a singular suffix to "your house" [אֶל-בֵּיתְךָ]. The Septuagint and the Syriac indicate a plural form [עַל-בְּתִיכֶם] "your houses".

see ZIMMERLI 452

78. MITCHELL 60-61

WEHMEIER 86

"Der Nachsatz bezieht sich wohl nicht nur auf die Erteilung des priesterlichen Segens, sondern meint im umfassenden Sinne, dass sich die Möglichkeit neuen, heilvollen Lebens erschliesst."

ascribed to them in the Pentateuch.(79)

The prophet Malachi denounces the children of Jacob for failing to pay the tithe in full. They are robbing God. The entire nation is at fault. God is none the less merciful. If they will restore to him what they owe and bring the full tithe into his storehouses, they themselves will not go short. God will "pour down for you an overflowing blessing" [וְהִרְקַתִּי לָכֶם בְּרָכָה Malachi 3.10]. He will open the windows of heaven and the soil will be fertile. God will rid them of the devouring locust and the land will be a land of delight. The payment of the tithe seems to be the prerequisite for all this to happen.(80)

#### 8.4 Summary

The first and most obvious thing that must be recorded about blessing in the prophets is just how little reference there is to it in their writings. That is to say that there are few specific references to בְּרָכָה. What allusions there are show the content of blessing, in harmony with other parts of the Hebrew scriptures, to be concrete, physical prosperity, abundant crops, fertile earth, an overflowing supply of water, long life, well-being and peace. The people will once again be a great and numerous nation.

It is, however, this latter fact which gives a new slant to what the

---

79. ZIMMERLI 463

80. WEHMEIER 220

"Nach Mal 3,10 ist die vorbehaltlose Ablieferung des Zehnten die Voraussetzung dafür, dass Jahwe wieder Regen schickt und reiche Ernten ermöglicht."



prophets have to say. It is significant that those prophets who have anything at all to say about blessing are those who look for the restoration of the people after the Babylonian Exile. It is hard to talk of blessing on the threshold of disaster. When Jerusalem is in ruins, it does not appear that God is with us and that he is prospering his people. It is not that Yahweh has reneged on the covenant. His *hesed* is still the same, steadfast and loyal. It is the fault of the people that things have gone so terribly wrong. But the time will come when they will be restored to the land of Judah, when Jerusalem will be rebuilt and the Temple re-established on God's holy hill. They must repent of their wickedness [Joel 2]. Then Yahweh will once again show himself to be their God. They are not asked for repentance for single, individual sins. A whole new reorientation of life is required. The starkness of the choice facing them is presented in graphic terms in what Joel has to say about the Day of the LORD.

What the prophets remember, however, is the way in which God took Abraham and made him into a great and mighty nation. What God could do with and for an old man with a barren wife he will do again and make the Jewish exiles into a great and mighty nation [Isaiah 61.7-9], once more established on Mount Zion [Ezekiel 34.26], with Jerusalem restored to glory [Zechariah 8]. "...then nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory [Jeremiah 4.2]. It is, however, in Yahweh not in Abraham that they bless themselves [Isaiah 65.16]. They will look once again to Jerusalem and recognize in the Jews what it is to be blessed of God.

The prophetic vision is of a God who is not only God of Judah but also God of Egypt and Assyria [Isaiah 19.24-25]. This God is God of the whole earth. He has therefore still a purpose for the remnant of

Israel, the juice in the cluster of grapes. The "new heaven and the new earth" still retains a position of pre-eminence for God's chosen people.

There is to what some of the prophets have to say about blessing a slightly anti-cultic and anti-priestly flavour. There is the beginning of the questioning that becomes acute in the wisdom literature as to whether wealth is the inevitable and necessary sign of God's favour [Zechariah 11.5]. The prophets are, however, not against the cult nor against the priesthood as such. They exhort the people to rebuild God's house [Haggai 2]. They recognize that God himself provides the means for his worship and they know the rôle the offerings brought to the Temple at God's behest have to play in meeting the needs of the poor [Ezekiel 44.17-31]. The people must pay the tithe [Malachi 3.10] and the priests must perform their solemn duties so that their blessings may indeed be blessings, for only in their faithful service will Yahweh respond to the declarations made in his name [Malachi 2.2].

## Part III Findings

### Chapter 9

#### The Significance of Blessing

##### 9.1 Blessing in perspective

The first and primary task of this essay has been to look at the concept of blessing in the Hebrew scriptures, to ask about the coherence of what is written there [p.10]. What picture of God does the examination of בִּרְכָה in its many and varied contexts produce and what end does this knowledge serve [p.11]? Is there one overarching theology of blessing or does the examination of the Hebrew scriptures reveal that there are different ways of understanding the concept? Is there any sense in which the idea of blessing developed over the years spanned by the Old Testament [p.10]?

However, before beginning any summary of the results yielded by the contextual analysis of the בִּרְכָה-root, one thing must be made clear. What the writers of the various books of the Old Testament have to say about blessing is one dimension of their insight into what God is like. It is not all that they have to say about the being and activity of God. For example, as well as describing him as the God who blesses, the Yahwist, on the basis that Abraham is to be the source of blessing for many nations, also describes God as a Judge who decides to tell Abraham his plans for Sodom and Gomorrah "because... their sin is very grave". God wants the inhabitants of these cities to prosper



but he treats their sin with the utmost seriousness.(1) As well as being intimately involved in providing for the daily needs of his people during their desert wanderings (2) God is also, according to the Deuteronomist, the awesome God of the covenant who "has shown us his glory and greatness".(3) As well as speaking of God as concerned with the fruitfulness of everything he has made, the Priestly writers' characteristic way of referring to him is as "God Almighty", **אֱלֹהֵי שָׁמַיִם**.(4) What the authors of the Old Testament scriptures have to say about blessing is only a part of their total picture of what God is like. It is none the less a real part, which deserves to be set alongside the other insights they have into the nature and being of God and to be taken seriously.

A further demonstration of the relatedness of blessing-talk lies in its connection with a cluster of associated ideas. Blessing does not encompass all that is to be said about God nor is it separated from the rest of the thought world of the Old Testament. As the contextual analysis in chapters 3-8 shows it stands in a close relationship to many other great Hebrew concepts like **חֵסֶד וְאֱמֶת**, **שָׁלוֹם**, **צְדָקָה** and **בְּרִית**. It stands in many contexts alongside what the Hebrew scriptures have to say about curse and is itself called in question by the suffering of the righteous.(5) It hooks into all these fields of thought, each of which might be a study in itself. What follows is a brief sketch of the way blessing links with **חֵסֶד וְאֱמֶת**, **שָׁלוֹם**, **צְדָקָה** and **בְּרִית**.

- 
1. Genesis 18
  2. Deuteronomy 2.7
  3. Deuteronomy 5.24
  4. see Genesis 35.11 - p.121
  5. see chapter 10

### 9.1.1 Blessing and בְּרָכָה

The relationship between blessing and בְּרָכָה is well illustrated by reference to the Yahwist. In Genesis 12.1-3 he gave no reason why Abraham should be chosen for blessing, although through God's blessing of him and his descendants Yahweh's favourable intentions for the whole world will be made clear. People will pray to be blessed as he is blessed.<sup>(6)</sup> However, in Genesis 18.18-19 the Yahwist goes beyond that to affirm that the purpose of God in choosing Abraham is that he might teach his own people God's way of righteousness and justice,<sup>(7)</sup> i.e. make them aware that the way the world works best is in fulfilling God's purposes for it. If people live according to God's intention [בְּרָכָה],<sup>(8)</sup> then all will be well and blessing will follow. God has called Abraham in order that through the right relationship which he and his descendants enjoy with Yahweh, all the nations of the earth may know the purpose of God's creation, live themselves according to the Creator's plan and be blessed as Abraham was blessed.

This is not based on a divine whim. It flows from who God is. *God cannot be other than righteous.* He cannot deny his own purposes.<sup>(9)</sup>

---

6. see pp 63-64

7. see p 59

8. von RAD Old Testament Theology I 370

"There is absolutely no concept in the Old Testament with so central a significance for all the relationships of human life as that of בְּרָכָה. It is the standard not only for man's relationship to God, but also for his relationships to his fellows, reaching right down to the most petty wranglings - indeed, it is even the standard for man's relationship to the animals and to his natural environment."

9. FAHLGREN 81

"s<sup>e</sup>dākā ist nämlich immer kennzeichnend für Jahve und bestimmend für all sein Handeln."

God is a God of righteousness as well as a blessing God. It is therefore not surprising that von Rad should include in his definition of righteousness not only that it is the standard for the relationship of human beings with their God and with each other but also that it is the standard of the relationship between human beings and animals and between human beings and the natural environment. "...Jahweh's צדק was active not only in the sphere of history, it was also operative in places which we call 'the realm of nature'." (10) He quotes Joel 2.23f, translating: "Shout for joy, ye sons of Zion... for he gives you the early rain in righteousness [לצדקתו], (11) he makes the rain come down and the threshing floors are full, the vats overflow with wine and oil." The picture is one of superabundant blessing.

However, the people's apostasy has been very great. Their relationship with Yahweh has gone wrong because of their sin. A wrong relationship with him leads to things going wrong within the natural world. The hinge of Joel's argument is: "Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repents of evil." (12) Plenty will then be restored. (13) The key to the promised abundance is "the early rain לצדקתו". [If the ל is understood to be the ל of "reference to a norm or standard", (14) then לצדקתו would have to be translated "he has given the early rain according to its purpose" which is, of course, to procure the fruitfulness of the earth.] The right relationship of human beings with God has concrete effects on their relationship with the

---

10. von RAD Old Testament Theology I 375

11. RSV translates "for your vindication"

12. Joel 2.13

13. see pp 214-215, 225

14. see BDB 516a



physical world.

Because **צדקה** is the fabric of the relationship of human beings with God and because it is what makes real community possible, when community and relationship are threatened, "justice" in a forensic sense may be an appropriate translation in some contexts. It involves a recognition of mutual rights and responsibilities.<sup>(15)</sup> This is why understanding blessing as the showering of God's bounty upon the community involves making careful provision for the poor, the widow and the orphan, as well as for the priests and levites who themselves have no land on which to grow their own food.<sup>(16)</sup> "Common Justice", "righteousness", the norm on which community is built, requires it. To fail to recognize responsibility for other people within the same community would lead to its disintegration.<sup>(17)</sup> A society's strength is measured by the quality of its care for those who do not share fully in its privileges. God's blessing is for all people.

#### 9.1.2 Blessing and **שְׁלוֹם**

**שְׁלוֹם** like blessing is God's gift but the first and basic meaning of

---

15. FAHLGREN 81

"In oder nach  $s^e d\bar{a}k\bar{a}$  wandeln, bedeutet, ebenso wie  $s^e d\bar{a}k\bar{a}$  üben, all sein Tun und Lassen nach den Normen richten, die aus den Gemeinschaftsverhältnissen zwischen den Menschen und zwischen Gott und den Menschen entspringen."

16. cf Deuteronomy 14.27-29; p 99f

17. FAHLGREN 83

"Ein Reich ist glücklich und stark, in dem Masse wie die Gemeinschaftsnorm in ihm zu ihrem Recht kommt, unglücklich und dem Zusammenbruch nahe, insoweit  $s^e d\bar{a}k\bar{a}$  durch unsolidarische Auflösungstendenzen zurückgedrängt wird."

the root **שָׁלֵם** is wholeness and freedom from injury or damage.(18) It only rarely means "peace", that is "the absence of war". Its meaning, as with the concept of blessing too, has to be filled out by the various contexts in which it is found. It is a theological idea which takes its significance from its relationship with God. It is only in the later strands of the Old Testament that occasionally the root **שָׁלֵם** is used to describe a state of inner individual human peace. Whenever this *Ganzheit* is disturbed it is always a question of repairing human community or restoring a right relationship with God.

According to Hempel **שָׁלוֹם** is a comprehensive expression describing the content of blessing.(19) In fact Pedersen writes: "Peace and blessing are so closely united that they cannot be separated. Where there is blessing there must be peace..."(20) Pedersen's understanding of **שָׁלוֹם** is given by Walter Eisenbeis only limited approval. Pedersen is, he says, right that **שָׁלוֹם** is a central concept in Old Testament thought but his interpretation of it only holds good for a limited number of the occurrences of the root **שָׁלֵם**, in particular to those which owe their origin to an archaic ontology.(21) He believes that this ontology is no longer to be found in the classical prophets, their

---

18. EISENBEIS 353

"Die Grundbedeutung der Wurzel **שָׁלֵם** ist die der *Ganzheit* und *Unversehrtheit*."

see also HEMPEL 58-59. **שָׁלוֹם** is "der Zustand des Unversehrt- und Ungefährdetseins, der Ruhe und Sicherheit, des Glückes und des Heils im weitesten Umfang".

19. HEMPEL 58

"Sucht man nach einem zusammenfassenden Ausdruck, der alles in sich schliesst, was der alte Orientale als Inhalt des Segens für sich, für die ihm Nahestehenden und für sein Volk begehrt, so kann man kein anderes Wort finden als das eine: *šālōm*."

20. PEDERSEN *Israel* I-II 311

21. EISENBEIS 355

understanding of  $\text{שְׁלוֹם}$  being "im echten Sinne geschichtlich orientiert".(22)

In his analysis of the prophetic literature he makes a distinction between the cult prophets and the classical prophets. In the cult prophets  $\text{שְׁלוֹם}$  is directed to the human situation and means freedom from harm, well-being and community, i.e. it is they who make use of an archaic ontology. These concepts do not, he claims, achieve the depth of insight into the nature of salvation which is found in the great literary prophets.(23) A spiritualizing process has taken place.

In fact, however, Eisenbeis' own study reveals that in the vast majority of instances where the word  $\text{שְׁלוֹם}$  occurs, it has a material, physical dimension. Salvation [Heil], a basic part of his understanding of what constitutes  $\text{שְׁלוֹם}$ , is itself conceived in a very concrete way. Of the 236 examples of  $\text{שְׁלוֹם}$  in the Old Testament about half are to be found in the historical literature, where on Eisenbeis' own evidence the understanding of  $\text{שְׁלוֹם}$  is very tangible and solid.(24) The remaining 73 examples found in the prophets are used to support his contention that there has been a process of spiritualization.

There are many fewer references in the prophets to blessing than there are to  $\text{שְׁלוֹם}$ . However, as indicated above in chapter 8, what

---

22. EISENBEIS 355

23. EISENBEIS 184-185

24. Of many possible quotations to illustrate this point, in this case with reference to the Deuteronomic writings, EISENBEIS 112-113

"Dem Begriff des Heils liegen vielmehr Vorstellungen wie Gesundheit, Geordnetheit, Ungestörtheit und Unbelastetsein zugrunde, die ausserdem mit dem Gedanken des materiellen Wohlbestelltheits verbunden sind, der noch deutlich an verschiedenen Stellen erkenntlich ist."



allusions there are show the content of blessing to be concrete and tangible prosperity, abundant crops, fertile soil, a plentiful water-supply, long life, well-being and freedom from war.(25)

One would expect the same difficulty for prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah of Babylon in talking about blessing as in talking about **שְׁלוֹם**, with Jerusalem in ruins. The material nature of blessing in their writings therefore sits uncomfortably in a situation where it may well be true that historical circumstances enforced a process of spiritualization. Jeremiah especially undertakes a re-evaluation of **שְׁלוֹם** where **אֵין שְׁלוֹם** (26) but it remains a valid question as to whether **שְׁלוֹם** being "im echten Sinne geschichtlich orientiert" leads necessarily to deeper insight into the real nature of human life with God. It may simply lead to a devaluation of the physical material world and to a despising of God's good gifts. The Priestly Writers [see pp 113-114] - also knowing the disaster of the Exile - with their vision of the sabbath rest and their recognition of blessing as an endowment built into the creative processes, may well have a healthier attitude to what God has made, worshipping a God who wants his creation to flourish.

### 9.1.3 Blessing, **בְּרִית** and **חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת**.

If **שְׁלוֹם** is the content of blessing, then covenant and **חֶסֶד** are its context. There can be no doubt of the covenant context of God's promises of blessing to Abraham, as portrayed in the Yahwist's writings in the Book of Genesis. Yahweh promises him countless

---

25. see p 224

26. Jeremiah 6.14;8.11

descendants and a land. No reason is given for God's choice of Abraham but the covenant is not unconditional. Abraham must leave his homeland and journey into the unknown. The covenant obligation laid upon Abraham and his family, according to the Priestly writers, is that every male shall be circumcised as "a sign of the covenant between me and you".(27) This stipulation must be met so that "my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant" [17.13]. The covenant is, however, not irrevocable. To fail to be circumcised is to break it and involves being separated from the covenant people. The promise of blessing is for those who remain within the covenant.(28)

It would be wearisome to rehearse how the covenant context of blessing recurs in the Deuteronomist, in the historical writers, the Psalms and Wisdom, in a variety of guises. Repeated reference has been made to it in the analysis of the various strands of the Old Testament [chapters 3-8]. Suffice it to say that the covenant creates community and that blessing is experienced corporately. It is, however, clear that from the human side the covenant can be broken and blessing forfeited. From the side of God, because of God's  $\text{ברוך}$ , (29) the covenant is an everlasting covenant.

$\text{ברוך}$  can, of course, be predicated of both God and human beings. As George Farr reminds us: "Like  $\text{ברוך}$  Hosea thinks of  $\text{ברוך}$  as both human and divine. It is demanded of the people in 6.6, "For I desire

---

27. Genesis 17.11

28. see DUMBRELL 47-79

29. Nelson Glueck's monograph remains the seminal work on  $\text{ברוך}$ , although a good deal has been written in the light of it. The debate since he first wrote is admirably charted by Gerald A. Larue in the introduction to the 1967 edition of Glueck's work.

דָּוָן and not sacrifice".(30) Within a relationship of mutually accepted rights and responsibilities, between human beings, דָּוָן involves "reciprocity, mutual assistance, sincerity, friendliness, brotherliness, duty, loyalty and love."(31) When it is predicated of God it is a loyalty to his covenant which is both constant and consistent. Only God shows דָּוָן of this kind.(32) It is the hendiadys דָּוָן וְאֵמֶת, "true love" or "faithful love" which makes this clear. אֵמֶת has the quality of an adjective modifying דָּוָן, for with one exception (33) דָּוָן always precedes אֵמֶת.(34) דָּוָן is the presumption on which covenant is based. It is its motivating power and is everlasting because it arises out of who God is.

Blessing fits into this context as the overflow of God's covenant love. A good example of this is Genesis 24.27. "Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master." The demonstration in concrete terms that God's covenant love holds good is that Abraham's servant has successfully accomplished his mission. His past covenant love has been shown in the bounty that he has showered upon his servant. Whilst the covenant is conditional on human obedience to God, Yahweh's

---

30. FARR "The Concept of Grace in the Book of Hosea" 101

31. GLUECK 55

See also Edgar KELLENBERGER 185

"Wer *häsäd* tut, öffnet sich von innen heraus dem Andern und geht hilfreich auf ihn zu. Eine so spontan begründete Beziehung ist zugleich stets gefährdet und kann, statt sich immer neu zu aktualisieren, schliesslich jederzeit versanden. *häsäd wä'ämät* drückt aus, dass diese Beziehung trotz aller Gefährdung wirklich durchgehalten wird."

32. KELLENBERGER 185

"Menschlicher und göttlicher *häsäd* unterscheiden sich höchstens darin, dass eigentlich nur Jahwe konsequenten *häsäd* tun kann."

33. Psalm 89.24 וְאֵמֶת וְחֶסֶד עִמּוֹ

34. KELLENBERGER 2-3



gifts are not just rewards for good behaviour. They are love-gifts, the overspill of his nature.(35)

## 9.2 The politics of writing

Before attempting an assessment of the changes and developments which took place with regard to the concept of blessing in the period spanned by the Hebrew scriptures, one must ask why the various strands of the scriptures were written. Such a process is instructive in itself. However, it also affects both discussion of the way blessing was understood over the years and the ordering of any changes which took place.

There is no such thing as detached history. It is always written for a purpose, often by those in positions of dominance, or on their behalf. An examination of the concept of blessing reveals the truth of this contention in relation to the writings of the Yahwist. He first of all establishes the right of the Shemites to preeminence by reference to the relationships between the sons of Noah.(36) Then he traces the line of Shem down to Abraham. Abraham is a Shemite (37) and the prosperity and the political prominence of Israel and Judah under David and Solomon, he claims, is the outworking of God's promise to

---

35. Gillis GERLEMAN's interpretation of  $\overline{\text{רָבָה}}$  in terms of "excess" or "going too far" is based on an attempt to reconcile two divergent meanings of the same root. His proposal has not won a large measure of support. It does, however, have the merit of reflecting a context where the relationship with his creatures into which God enters has the character of *more than can be expected* and where the blessing/gifts are provided in superabundance.

see GERLEMAN "Das Übervolle Mass"

36. see Genesis 9

37. Genesis 11.10-32

Abraham in Genesis 12.1-3.(38) The Yahwist's main concern is the support of the monarchy. He wants to demonstrate the rightness of his contemporary situation by reference to God's promises made long ago to the ancient father of the nation, Abraham. He validates the occupation of Jerusalem, the former Jebusite fortress, which had belonged to neither Israel nor Judah, the selection of it as David's capital, as well as the focussing of worship on mount Zion, by reference to the story of Abraham and Melchizedek.(39) As Abraham paid the tithe to the ancient king-priest of Salem and received his blessing, so it is right for the Yahwist's contemporaries to pay tribute to David in Jerusalem and receive blessing by virtue of their relationship with him.

The story of the succession of Isaac and Jacob is told to legitimate the dominance of Israel and Judah over the other children of Abraham.(40) The giving of the greater and more powerful blessing to Ephraim rather than to Manasseh gives the rationale for the greater success of the junior branch of Joseph's descendants.(41) The so-called blessings of Jacob on his sons are not truly blessings (42) and they may well have existed as an independent unit. Some of the statements made could not possibly be a father's wishes for the future of his children. They do, none the less, serve a similar purpose to the writings of the Yahwist by reflecting the actual geographical dispositions and the political realities of the time of the compiler and similarly give retrospective validation to the *status quo*.

---

38. pp 53-54,62,84

39. Genesis 14, pp 72-74

40. Genesis 27; pp 76-77

41. Genesis 48; p 79

42. Genesis 49; p 80

The dominant position of the descendants of Abraham is not just for their own sake. Built into the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12.3 & 22.18 is the undertaking that through the people of Israel blessing will flow out to the rest of the world.(43) In the understanding of the Yahwist this is already a fact at the time of David and Solomon. This idea is, however, picked up by the prophets, itself an illustration of how the Yahwist's philosophy of history became a factor in the making of history,(44) so that the vision of Isaiah of Jerusalem includes a rôle for the Egyptians and the Assyrians in bringing blessing to the nations (45) and Jeremiah too with his expectation of a new covenant which is a "circumcision of the heart" can see restoration in terms of the nations gathering in the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem.(46) They will recognize in the Jews reinstalled in their holy city what it is to be blessed by Yahweh.

The promise of land to Abraham (47) contains implicitly the acknowledgement that there was a time when the land of Canaan belonged to someone else. Whether or not the Yahwist's readers knew the stories of the conquest of the land, his description of God's promise to Abraham is a powerful authority not only for having taken the land and having driven out the former inhabitants but also for keeping it, and, during and after the Exile, motivating the people to return to restore Jerusalem and the Temple. David's subjects are given the assurance of the rightness of their being in possession of

---

43. pp 56,58,59

44. see p 225

45. Isaiah 19; pp 202-204

46. see Jeremiah 3.15-18; 4.1-4; pp 209-210

47. Genesis 12.7a et al



the city.

The Yahwist's use of history set a pattern for subsequent historical writers. He took the external facts of his people's history and theologized them. With hindsight he was able to "discover" in the patriarchal sagas why things had worked out in the way they did. The prominent position of the people of Israel under the early monarchs was the consequence of God's promise to Abraham. It was based in God's will and purposes. Such a method of working created a tradition which authenticated contemporary events. This method of writing history was followed by future writers so that the Deuteronomic school retrospectively found authority for their own contemporary claims in the mouth of Moses.

By the time of the Deuteronomists the promise of land to the patriarchs was one of the givens which nobody questioned. It was not necessary for the Deuteronomic writers to show the legitimacy of Israel occupying Canaan. It was assumed. The tribes had in fact been long ensconced in the land and the rightness of them being there was not at issue. The concerns of the writers of Deuteronomy are somewhat different. They are directed towards reform of the kind undertaken by Josiah, although they are not totally identical.<sup>(48)</sup> They seek the suppression of the "high places", whose worship had become tainted with syncretistic practices relating to the fertility gods of the

---

48. von Rad Deuteronomy 26f

region, and they promulgate a single unitary cultus.(49) The actual break-up of the Assyrian empire would have made such a programme feasible.

The setting of the concerns of the Deuteronomic writers in the time of Moses and the declaration of the Law on the lips of Moses (50) are designed to give the claims of the Deuteronomists for their own time the authority of the great law-giver.(51) The nation is on the threshold of a new "promised land" and they should therefore be especially attentive to what is being said to them.

Just as the content of the Yahwist's historical method was part of the presuppositions of the Deuteronomists, so it became itself a factor in the P account of history. The Priestly writers were not, like the Yahwist, writing from a position of dominance. They wrote as representatives of the oppressed underdog at the time of the Exile in Babylon. The leaders of the people had been deported from Jerusalem, which itself lay in ruins. Their contemporaries needed to hear the message that this was not a cause for ultimate despair. The God who blessed Abraham through the embarrassingly barren Sarah (52) making her "the mother of nations" still wills their prosperity and will make them once again a numerous and mighty people. He wants them to return to Jerusalem, for the God who ordered the original chaos will

---

49. see 2 Kings 22-23

50. Deuteronomy 1.1-3

51. see von RAD Deuteronomy 29

"If Moses is envisaged as addressing through the imaginary audience of his contemporaries the actual Israel of the period of the kings, then this signifies that this recent Israel should understand itself as being still between the promise and the fulfilment, but yet already very near to the fulfilment." 29

52. Genesis 17; pp 117-118

re-create the city out of the rubble. He gave them the command to be fruitful and multiply.(53) They will once again increase and be a powerful nation.

It is, however, not just the Yahwist, the Deuteronomist and the Priestly writers who have a special stance which has to be taken seriously in reading their work. The concerns of the Chronicler are not identical with those of his primary sources, so that it is important to ask why he omits material found in Samuel and Kings and why he diverges from them. Like him, with his special interest in the Temple and the worship there, they too have their "political" reasons for writing. For example, even the prayer: "Now therefore may it please thee to bless the house of thy servant that it may continue for ever before thee..." (54) has an underlying political motive. It seeks to establish a dynastic principle that has not previously pertained. Saul was not succeeded by one of his sons. In recording this prayer the historian is seeking to show that the succession of David's line in Israel is in accordance with God's will and that David's descendants are the legitimate heirs to the throne. The stories of Hiram, king of Tyre,(55) and the Queen of Sheba,(56) equally are told to enhance the standing and reputation of Solomon. Hiram is relieved that his father's policies will continue. Sheba plays the rôle of the awe-struck admirer. The examination of each context to ask why it was written gives important insight into how the concept of blessing was used by the writers of the Old Testament.

---

53. Genesis 1.28; see pp 111,134

54. 2 Samuel 7.29

55. 1 Kings 5 & 2 Chronicles 2; pp 150-151

56. 1 Kings 10.9 & 2 Chronicles 9.8; pp 154-156



### 9.3 The development of the concept of blessing

The notion of development is a slippery one. It can easily be understood in linear terms, moving from the base and corrupt, to the lofty and pure. "Later" does not necessarily mean a more elevated understanding. Nor is it easy to describe development in unitary terms when dealing with several strands of scripture. However, there can be no doubt whatsoever that the origins of blessing lie far back in the world of magic. Although those writers who first handle the concept take great pains to bring their material into relationship with Yahweh,<sup>(57)</sup> traces of magical practice remain. Such is the case in the story of Isaac blessing Jacob (58) where there are clear indications that blessing stems from a world of magic. The power-laden nature of the word spoken by an empowered person, the elderly, dying Isaac, a word that cannot be recalled or repeated with another person as the object of the same blessing, the certainty that what is expressed will come about, these are signs that the roots of this story are very ancient.

The story of Balaam, the charismatic seer, is itself a living illustration of how blessing and curse cannot be manipulated for unworthy ends. Blessing belongs to God and since he has already blessed the people of Israel there is nothing that Balaam can do about it. His curse is ineffective because it too depends upon Yahweh for its enactment. However, the coherence of the story depends on the ancient magical belief in the automatic efficacy of the powerful

---

57. see pp 75-76

58. Genesis 27

word.(59)

The account of Jacob's return to his own land with his entourage includes the story of his combat with a river spirit at the ford of the Jabbok. An old folk-tale, with its implicit idea that blessing in the form of power can be wrested from God and that that power is available to the one who knows his name, is used to account for the change of name of Jacob, the deceiver, to Israel, the one who wrestles with God.(60) The Yahwist with great skill took this and other ancient stories and historicized them in terms of his own amazing, soaring sense of the vocation and destiny of his people. He linked the patriarchal sagas with the known course of his people's settlement of the land of Canaan and, with his contemporary situation in the early days of the monarchy in mind, added to the patriarchal stories the dimension of promise, the content of which is God's blessing, the gift of prosperity, and the land which his people now occupy. This prosperity is achieved at the time of David and Solomon.

It is problematic whether the Yahwist's *primaeval* history is intended to do more than set the history of his own people on to the larger map to show how it sits in relation to other peoples. In later strands God's intention for Israel relates to the whole of the human race achieving a right relationship with God. That purpose is, however, already stated in a schematic way in the key-note assertion of Genesis 12.1-3. "And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the

---

59. Numbers 22-24; see pp 70-71

60. Genesis 32; see pp 65-66

earth shall bless themselves."(61)

It is often claimed that blessing in the Yahwist's scheme of things is *unconditional*.(62) If reference is made only to the transference of the blessing-promises from Abraham to Isaac and from Isaac to Jacob certainly no conditions are specified. However, it is hardly true that the promise of blessing to Abraham is unconditional. The condition is his obedience. He must obey God's command to set out from his homeland to seek a new land and he must remain faithful to the covenant which God makes with him. There would be no point in testing Abraham by asking him to take his son, his only son, and sacrifice him in the land of Moriah to see whether he will still be obedient to God's command, if the relationship with Yahweh does not, at least in some measure, depend upon it.(63) On the one hand the transfer of blessing to Isaac is not described in any detail at all. On the other the story of the transmission of blessing from Isaac to Jacob is perhaps one of the best known in the entire Old Testament. However, the terms of the "succession" must be read in the light of the programmatic statement to Abraham if they are to have any claim to be "a great nation" and a source of blessing to others. Obedience and faithfulness to the covenant relationship with Yahweh are required if the promises are to be fulfilled. It is this same covenant to which Isaac and Jacob are heirs.

It is the word "gift" which is the key to grasping what characterizes

61. SCHREINER 6

"Alle Menschen haben also eine Segensmöglichkeit in Abraham."

62. see WESTERMANN Blessing in the Bible 54

63. This is based on the belief that the story of the sacrifice of Isaac belongs to the J strand and not to the Elohist.

See ELLIS 34



the Yahwist's understanding of blessing.<sup>64</sup> It is linked with the promises made to Abraham in Genesis 12.1-3 and 7a. Blessing is something which God does. It is not something simply built-in to the processes of nature. It is the end-result of God carrying out his promises to those who live the life of obedience, exemplified by Abraham.

The Book of Deuteronomy is a compilation of various traditions. It cannot have reached its present shape until the final editing of the Pentateuch. It is an attempt to resist the pressure towards syncretism in belief and practice at the time of the later monarchy under Josiah and is related to the reforms which he instituted. It employs the literary device of an extended sermon addressed by Moses to the people on the threshold of entry into the land of promise exhorting them not to go after other gods. They must remember the covenant. In fact the context of the whole book may well have been covenant renewal. Deuteronomy is no detached and objective account of what happened immediately prior to the occupation of the land. Just as the Yahwist wrote to authenticate the political situation of his own day, so Deuteronomy is written and compiled with the deliberate intention of facing the people of Josiah's day with the stark choice between blessing and curse.

It is the Deuteronomic strand which makes the conditional nature of blessing crystal clear. The sermon set in the mouth of Moses calls upon God to bear witness that "I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice, and

---

64. see pp 19-20, especially the reference to FAHLGREN, footnote 31

cleaving to him; for that means life to you and length of days, that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them." (65) The whole argument of Deuteronomy stands under the conditional "if". "If you obey my commandments..." then the result will be the practical benefits of a good harvest, increase of flocks and herds. If they turn aside and serve other gods, Yahweh will be angry and the results will be calamitous. There will be no rain and the land will not yield its fruit and "you will perish quickly off the good land which the LORD gives you". (66) Blessing and curse are the direct consequences of human choice. Clear alternatives are set before the people. They must not look to the Baalim for the fertility of their land. Yahweh is the God of blessing and he will supply all their needs. (67) He provided for them in the desert. (68) He will continue to make provision for them in the land of promise, on condition that they obey his laws and keep his commandments. Although the seeds of a problem are already there in the Yahwistic understanding of blessing as the fulfilment of Yahweh's promises, it is the Deuteronomic way of understanding blessing with its offer of a straight choice between blessing-life and curse-death which runs headlong into the problem of the suffering and the poverty of the righteous and the health and wealth of the wicked.

One way in which the Deuteronomists themselves felt the problem of blessing failing "to deliver the goods" was in relation to the poor, the widow, and the orphan, belonging to the people of Israel. Their concern for these people, extended to include the landless levite and the

---

65. Deuteronomy 30.19-20

66. cf Deuteronomy 11.13f

67. Deuteronomy 1.8-11

68. Deuteronomy 2.7

traveller, is expressed in their repeated insistence that the Law makes provision for all and that the wealth and health of the nation depend on the poor receiving their share in God's bounty.(69) In what they have to say about bringing the tithe (70) and lending to those who require help there is an immense sense of the solidarity of the covenant community, to the point that "there will be no poor among you..."(71) The assurance that this is the will of Yahweh is his **רַחֲמָנָה**, his steadfast love for all his people.(72)

In Deuteronomy, as in the Yahwist's writing, blessing is best understood in terms of "gift". In response to the people's obedience to the Law, God gives abundant harvest. Although Deuteronomy purports to be a sermon on the lips of Moses before entering the land of promise, the end-product of blessing is what a settled agricultural community desires, "the fruit of the ground".(73) The promise does not relate so much to the land as to the fruitfulness of the earth. The tribes are in fact already in possession of Canaan and the promise is not specifically "a land which I will show you"(74). It is an open-ended promise which relates to how God is always prepared to deal with his people, if... "And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us."(75) It is characteristic of the Deuteronomic description of this agricultural prosperity that it is not "just enough". It has the flavour of excess about it. The provision Yahweh makes is always

---

69. pp 99-105

70. cf Deuteronomy 14.22f

71. Deuteronomy 15.4

72. see pp 87-88

73. Deuteronomy 26.1-4

74. Genesis 12.1 [J]

75. Deuteronomy 6.25



"more than enough" so that there is an adequate supply for all. There can, however, be no doubt that the major emphasis which the Deuteronomists bring to the discussion of blessing is the conditional nature of it. The people have a free choice between blessing and curse. The one brings life; the other brings death.

The problem of the unjust suffering of the righteous which runs counter to the Deuteronomic scheme of things is given voice on many occasions in the Psalms. The voice of protest is raised against the unjust suffering of good people and the obvious prosperity of the wicked.<sup>(76)</sup> The whole of the Book of Job might be described as a discourse on the subject of blessing and innocent suffering and a protest against the straight equation of blessing and prosperity. However, the greatest contradiction of the prevailing historicized view of blessing which had seen its fulfilment under David and Solomon in Jerusalem was the catastrophe of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and the consequent deportation of its citizens into Exile. It looked as if Yahweh had abandoned his covenant with his chosen people. Not so, said both the prophets and the priests. Yahweh made Abraham a numerous people and what he did once he will do again. He will restore his covenant people to Jerusalem but they must repent of their former wickedness.

It is in the writings of the Priests that there is a significant change in the concept of blessing. They know the disaster of the Fall of Jerusalem before the onslaught of the Babylonian armies. They recognize the challenge that this constitutes to their special sense of being God's chosen people. They therefore proclaim that blessing is not

---

76. cf Psalm 73

something that belongs peculiarly to the people of Israel. It is an endowment within all living things, not only human beings but also within birds and fish and animals.(77) The distinctive addition to God's ordinances in relation to human beings is that they are to "have dominion" over the rest. Although plants and trees are not mentioned specifically in Genesis 1.20-28, they are added [v.29] to what God gives to human beings for their food and are described as yielding fruit in which is their seed according to their own kinds.(78) Within them too lies the possibility of their propagation. Blessing for the Priestly writers is then the power of fertility which enables human beings and animals to be fruitful, to multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. It is part of the very fabric of creation.

Blessing may yet be experienced as "gift" because it is built in to God's provision for the well-being of his creatures. "And God saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good."(79) Blessing may be experienced as "gift" with regard to the concrete outcome of this endowment within creation. However, what is distinctive in the teaching of the Priestly writers is that blessing is first and foremost a potential which has to be actualized rather than the end-product of God's promises. It is inherent within the creative processes as a statement of God's intention for what he has made that it should prosper and flourish. The message for those who experienced the desolation of the Exile is that it still lies within them to be fruitful and multiply and have dominion according to God's purposes. They can

---

77. Genesis 1.22,28; pp 110-112

78. Genesis 1.11-12

79. Genesis 1.31

once again thrive. Just as after the Flood,(80) in spite of human disobedience, Yahweh reaffirmed his desire to bring order out of chaos, so he stands by his creative intention for them. However, the setting of this reaffirmation in the context of the whole created order makes it clear that the actualization of blessing for the Jews is not for their sake alone. It is so that through them the whole human race may know God's will and purposes. This is a theme taken up by some of the prophets.(81) The covenant which the Priestly writers introduce alongside the reaffirmation of blessing is "with you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations".(82)

It is because blessing is understood by the Priestly writers in terms of fertility that they do not use the word "bless" with God as the object of it.(83) It is simply not a concept which in their terms may be applied to him. God does not need to be helped to flourish. Blessing is none the less something which he may raise from the potential to the actual in the lives of human beings. When it is said that God blessed, for example, Sarah,(84) he is not doing something impossible, or contrary to nature. He is making actual the potential within her. Blessing a person in the name of Yahweh is a request to him to do precisely that, to take action to help the person or the community to whom the blessing is addressed to flourish, to prosper, to succeed. It is a form of intercessory prayer but it also expresses the fact that God works within the creative processes of which he is the originator.

---

80. Genesis 9.1.7; pp 116-117

81. cf Isaiah 61; p 207

82. Genesis 9.12f

83. see p 129

84. Genesis 17



The large vision and the focussed concern lie side by side in the Priestly writings. The priests set their story into a universal context and show that blessing belongs to all human beings. At the same time the Priestly strand demonstrates a tendency to institutionalize blessing and to make it the special concern, but not the sole concern, of the priests in Jerusalem.(85) Such a tendency can only make sense, in view of the large perspectives of the Priestly writers, if the prayer offered in the Temple and through its worship is considered to be on behalf of the whole human race. The prayers of the priests are one way in which Yahweh has made it possible for free human beings to cooperate with his purposes for the world.(86)

In describing the development of the concept of blessing within the Old Testament it is not possible to arrive at a tidy summary position where all the elements of blessing are neatly tied together. The Psalms, the Wisdom literature and the historical writings reflect a variety of situations and what constitutes blessing has to be determined in each case by the context. There is in the Psalms none the less a questioning why the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper, and blessing is often straightforwardly a part of the vocabulary of praise.(87) The Wisdom literature with its strong catechetical tone reflects quite distinctly the consequential thinking of Deuteronomy, whereby right living is rewarded with prosperity and wickedness leads to disaster (88) but there is also evidence in Proverbs of a concern for the poor which also springs from the Deuteronomic tradition. The sages, however, show an awareness that

---

85. Numbers 6; pp 124-129 & Leviticus 9; pp 131-133,134

86. see p 124

87. pp 184-185

88. pp 173-174

wealth is not always the outflow of righteous living and introduce the thought that it matters how wealth is acquired. It cannot be designated "blessing" apart from a sense that it comes from God.(89)

In spite of the common assertion that a spiritualizing process takes place in the classical prophets with regard to *שְׁלוֹם*,(90) they are remarkably capable of describing blessing in concrete, physical terms.(91) It is true that blessing does not have the prominent place in the prophetic scheme of things that it has for the Yahwist, the Deuteronomist and the Priestly writer. However, in the writings of the prophets God acts in the ordinary processes of nature as well as in judgement. He both maintains the daily fabric of human life and also works for the salvation of his people and the whole world.(92) It remains true that salvation-history is concerned more with events in time than with natural processes. Nevertheless the prophetic literature contains both the large eschatological vision of Second and Third Isaiah, which reaches out to the whole world, as well as the sharply focussed, exclusive concern of Haggai, for whom the restoration of blessing relates intimately to the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.(93)

The idea of blessing continues to develop within Judaism, within the

---

89. pp 175-176

90. cf EISENBEIS 355

91. p 215

92. WEHMEIER 221

"Tritt das Thema "Segen" in der Prophetie einerseits stark zurück, so ist doch andererseits in der Verkündigung der exilischen und nachexilischen Zeit nicht ausser acht gelassen, dass es verschiedene Weisen des Handelns Gottes gibt: das punktuelle Eingreifen in geschichtlichen Ereignissen und das stetige Wirken im Segen."

93. pp 215,226

christian community and subsequently within Islam. It is therefore inevitable that tracing development of the concept of blessing in the Hebrew scriptures will leave unfinished thoughts and ideas which are retained alongside each other because they all contain some aspect of the truth but which do not fit snugly together. What is clear is that the various strands are not synthesized in the Old Testament in any neat and tidy way. The process of change and development in understanding what constitutes God's blessing goes on.

#### 9.4 The content of blessing

In the broadest terms the content of blessing must be defined as that which contributes to the flourishing, prosperity and well-being of God's creation. Throughout this study it has been maintained that blessing must be examined in context. Consequently the content of blessing has to be determined in each individual case. However, in every part of the Hebrew scriptures, including the classical Prophets where there is a tendency for exegetes to talk of the spiritualization of Hebrew thought, the content of blessing is described in remarkably solid, physical, material, tangible terms. None the less, when blessing takes place it is the context which supplies the specific content and identifies what it is that constitutes well-being. The range of things which are received as God's good gift is extensive.



It consists in having children, usually many children,(94) good crops,(95) large flocks and herds,(96) an abundant water supply,(97) and fertile soil.(98) It means living in good health (99) to a ripe old age.(100) having fame and fortune.(101) It may be the avoidance of war or it may be military success, the defeat of the enemy and victory in battle, which provides large amounts of booty.(102) It may be the endowment of an individual with a particular gift, like physical strength or exceptional wisdom, for the benefit of the community.(103) It is food and clothing and shelter and all that which makes life good and enjoyable.(104) It might be the guarantee of successors on the throne.(105) Because all these things come from the hands of God, blessing is received as a gift and often spoken of in terms of thanksgiving and gratitude.

However, one element in the content of the blessing-promises to Abraham, which has been influential beyond all other, is the promise of land. At first it is unspecified land, "the land which I will show you"

---

94. cf Genesis 1.28;12.1-3;15.5;17;22.17;28.14a;35.9; Deuteronomy 7.13; Ruth 4.14; 1 Samuel 2; 1 Chronicles 26.5; Job 1; Psalm 115.15; Isaiah 51.1-7 et al; pp 52,87,110,112-113,117,137,146,162,167,192,207

95. Deuteronomy 7.13;26; Psalm 107.38; Joel 2.19; Haggai 2.19  
pp 87,88,123,173,215,216

96. Genesis 24.31;28;30.43

97. Joshua 15.19; Judges 1.15; Psalm 84; Isaiah 44.3; Ezekiel 34.26  
pp 199-200,204-206,213

98. Jeremiah 31; Malachi 3.10

99. Job 1; pp 89,167,184

100. Isaiah 51.1-3. The patriarchs all live to a great age.

101. Genesis 12.1-3;39.2-3,21; Proverbs 10; Zechariah 11.5  
pp 52,174,220

102. Genesis 14; Deuteronomy 7.16; Judges 5.2,9; 2 Samuel 18.28;  
2 Chronicles 20.25; pp 148,154,159,161

103. Judges 13; 1 Kings 10.9; 2 Chronicles 9.8; pp 135,155

104. Deuteronomy 2.7; pp 85-86

105. 1 Kings 2.45; 2 Samuel 7.29b; pp 139,140-141

but once arrived in Canaan "the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, "To your descendants I will give this land.""(106) This promise gave the tribes of Israel "permission" for the conquest and occupancy of Canaan. By the time of the Deuteronomists it is the wonderful fertility of this land which is emphasized. "For I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to give to their fathers..."(107) The people must be in no doubt that it is not the old gods of the land who sustain them. It is Yahweh who gives the land and makes it yield such an abundance of agricultural produce and raw materials.

Although blessing may be the reward of faithfulness, as in the case of the Levites who stood up for Yahweh in the face of the people's apostasy,(108) although in the teaching of Deuteronomy blessing is conditional upon the people's obedience to the law of God, the content of blessing is habitually lavish, not just enough, but more than enough to supply the needs of all. The very description of a land "flowing with milk and honey" is a picture of superabundance where there is enough to deal generously with the poor, the widow, the orphan and the sojourner.(109) The injunction to leave the borders of the cornfield for the gleaners is a demonstration that there is more than the farmer needs.(110) Even the provision for the landless Levite, when the people are reminded to bring the tithe, is one of excess.(111) What is brought far exceeds immediate need. The bounty which God supplies is overwhelmingly generous. Such provision is for the enjoyment of his

---

106. Genesis 12.1,7a

107. Deuteronomy 31.20

108. Exodus 32.29; pp 69-70

109. Deuteronomy 26.13

110. Leviticus 19.9-10 cf Ruth 2

111. 2 Chronicles 31.8; p 144

servants. It is to be received as God's gift with thankfulness. "...you shall rejoice in all the good which the LORD your God has given to you and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you."(112)

### 9.5 The function of blessing-talk

The people of Israel were sure that he who had made them had made everything that is. There is only one God and he is a God who creates.(113) They were, however, not only concerned to proclaim him to be the transcendent creator-God. They were also concerned to demonstrate that he is present everywhere in the world he has made.(114) They knew that to acknowledge him as Creator "in the beginning" did not involve any necessary belief in his continuing presence in a living relationship with them in the present. So, they used anthropomorphic pictures to tell stories about God's activity in his world. They spoke of creation itself taking place by his Spirit (115) and by his Word (116) and by his Wisdom.(117) They spoke of angels who carried messages from God to human beings.(118) They heard his voice in the great happenings of the natural world, through storm and

---

112. Deuteronomy 26.11

113. see Genesis 1-2.3 [P], 2.4f [J]; Job 38; Psalm 104 et al.

114. see Psalm 139.1-18

115. Genesis 1.2

116. "And God said, "Let there be..." [Genesis 1.3,6,9 etc]

117. Psalm 104.24; Proverbs 3.19

cf W. BOUSSET quoted by DÜRR 122. These are "Mitteldinge zwischen Personen und abstrakten Wesen, nicht so losgelöst von Gott wie die konkreten Engelgestalten, mehr mit seinem Wesen verschmolzen und zu ihm gehörig, aber doch wieder gesondert gedacht."

118. cf Genesis 16.7; 18; 19.1 et al



fire and tempest.(119) They followed him in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.(120) They experienced his majesty and holiness in his Glory.(121) These were all ways of describing how the transcendent God yet approaches his creatures.

Blessing too is concerned with how Yahweh relates to the world. It is an activity of God, which expresses his beneficent intention for his creation (122) as well as signifying his providential care.(123) God's intention embraces both the beginning of things and the goal and purpose of creation, the origin of it all [protology] and the end of it all [eschatology].(124) Blessing is also concerned with God's presence in and involvement with what he has made in order to achieve his purposes. The blessing-activity of God is another way in which he deals with his creation but in this case the dominant note of the relationship is that he actively creates the conditions in which his world may prosper and flourish. His is no uninvolved presence. Blessing is about the quality and content of experience with God which enables human beings to know life itself as "gift" (125) and enables the whole of the created universe to thrive.

#### 9.5.1 God's relationship with the created world

---

119. cf Job 38.1; Ezekiel 3.12-13 pp 219-220

In 1 Kings 19.1-12 Elijah does not on this occasion meet God in the earthquake, wind and fire, although these are precisely natural happenings in which he might normally have expected to hear God's voice.

120. Exodus 13.21-22

121. Leviticus 9.6,23; Numbers 16.19,42; 20.6

122. Genesis 1.28 [P]; 12.2-3 [J]

123. Deuteronomy 2.7; see pp 85-86

124. see pp 113-114

125. pp 143, 198, 201 et al

---

The relationship which God desires with what he has made is based on his covenant love and his declared purpose that it should prosper.(126) His covenant relationship with the people of Israel is intended to mirror the relationship which he wants with all his creatures. Because a living relationship involves a degree of mutuality, God has limited himself to make a free relationship possible.(127) What God does affects human beings. What human beings do affects God. There is reciprocity within a living relationship.(128) That relationship is given intimate expression in worship.(129)

God is with his people even when they are unaware of him.(130) His presence enables them to flourish and to succeed in what they undertake.(131) It is not necessary to summon God. He is with his people. He is not a distant God but closely involved with his world and blessing is experienced in the "presence" of Yahweh [German: Jahves Mit-Sein].(132) There are 103 occasions when  $\text{QY}$  and  $\text{NX}$  are used to describe how he is with his people. They refer to past, present and

---

126. see pp 87-88, 186-187, 201 et al

127. cf FRETHEIM 78

128. HESCHEL II 263

"God 'looks at' the world and is affected by what happens in it; man is the object of His care and judgement."

129. see 9.5.2 below for a discussion of the mutuality of relational categories with regard to worship

130. cf Genesis 28.16

131. cf Judges 6.12 - Gideon has to be told: "The LORD is with you" and that he will be able to overcome the Midianites.

132. This concept was first explored by Horst Dietrich PREUSS, following up a hint given by Claus WESTERMANN that "das Mitsein Gottes gehört in den Zusammenhang des Segens".

PREUSS 149 footnote 37

This work was continued and expanded by a pupil of Westermann, Dieter VETTER Jahves Mit-Sein als Ausdruck des Segens

future. The evidence that God is "with" someone is usually visible and concrete. According to Abimelech there is no gainsaying the fact that God is with Abraham. He succeeds in everything he does.(133) The same is said forcibly about Joseph. "The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian, and his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hands."(134) The examples may be multiplied to show that the accompanying presence of Yahweh yields great blessing. Whether in a settled context or wandering with the nomad on the way, for God to be with someone is for him to be protected and to thrive.(135) The companionship of God is the assurance of his constant blessing.

#### 9.5.2 Blessing and worship

Worship is the most intimate expression possible of the relationship between human beings and God. It is also the place where all the great theological paradoxes are held together in creative fashion. God is worshipped as the one who transcends his creation, who is beyond human conceiving. "The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens!"(136) At the same time he is worshipped as the one who gets involved in the world he has made. "Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down upon the heavens and the earth? He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from

---

133. Genesis 21.22

134. Genesis 39.2-3

135. VETTER 14 & 28

"Gottes Nahesein manifestiert sich in einem Zustand des Segens..." "Die Untersuchung lehrte die Formel vom Mit-Sein Jahves als einen Ausdruck des stetigen, segnenden Wirkens Gottes verstehen."

136. Psalm 113.4



the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people. He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the LORD!"(137) The paradox of God's transcendence and immanence are held together in a creative tension in worship.

The blessing of God by human beings can be expected to say something about what they believe God to be like. *Lex orandi lex credendi*. "Bless the LORD, O my soul... who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases..."(138) God is a merciful God. God heals... Prayer in all its forms reveals intimately what the worshipper believes. The analysis in chapters 3-8 of the multiple contexts in which God is blessed by human beings in each case shows some aspect of what the human partner in prayer understands to be the nature of God.

Blessing-prayer may be an outpouring of adoration and praise.(139) It may be an act of thanksgiving, an expression of gratitude, either for the general well-being of the worshipper or for a particular act of God.(140) Blessing-prayer may be intercession on behalf of someone else; it may be petition concerning one's own felt needs. In fact, whenever one person blesses another it is the expression of a wish [German: Wunschform]. It is optative, since it is a request addressed to God, asking him to do something on behalf of oneself or another person.(141) Prayer itself may be described as a God-given way of cooperating with his creative purposes, an area in which God has

---

137. Psalm 113.5-9

138. Psalm 103 1 & 3

139. cf Psalms 41.13; 72.18-19; 106.48

140. see Psalms 28.6-9; 31.21-24 where the phrase *יְהוָה יְהוָה* ... is followed by the particular cause of gratitude. p.189

141. see 9.6.1 below

given the initiative for action to his servants. Blessing is a specific instance of this, where God leaves to his followers a proactive rôle.

Certainly Yahweh-worshippers may be expected to exhort others to worship but *בְּרַכּוּ אֶת־יְהוָה* is not a summons to repeat a set formula. Although it may be a call to the people to respond to a particular act of Yahweh (142) it may be a larger invitation, to orientate the whole of one's life towards God in praise in daily living, in response to his mighty acts in history and in response to his creative working within the processes of life.(143) Although their relationship with Yahweh is through Solomon, even Hiram and Sheba are able to invite the people of Israel to be true to their own deepest insights and recognize God's wisdom in giving them a wise king.(144)

Blessing may also be an act of remembrance. "Take heed lest you forget..."(145) Because it is easy in the midst of abundance to forget the source of plenty, the people of Israel bless God for his daily provision for their needs. "And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you."(146) "You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the power to get wealth; that he may confirm his covenant which he swore to your fathers, as at this day."(147) God's blessing presence is experienced in daily awareness of his provision for the maintenance of life itself. It may be focussed in a specific way by people like the priests and levites who are appointed to a special rôle, including

---

142. cf Judges 5.2 & 5.9

143. see pp 185-186

144. see pp155-156

145. Deuteronomy 8.11

146. Deuteronomy 8.10

147. Deuteronomy 8.18

blessing "in his name".(148) It may be focussed at particular places. The Tent of the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, Jerusalem and, more particularly, the Temple, are appointed meeting-places where the people can expect to receive the blessing of Yahweh and where worship may be offered in concentrated form.(149)

A study of people blessing others demonstrates conclusively that a social inferior may bless a superior,(150) although it is not always clear which is which.(151) The superior's reputation and standing is thereby enhanced, the number of his supporters enlarged, and perhaps also his wealth increased by the paying of tribute or the offer of a gift. Blessing God, the infinitely superior, is likewise the giving of allegiance.(152) If it were not so, it would be to "take his name in vain". Blessing God is not therefore the mere shouting of metaphysical compliments into empty space, a mechanism for achieving psychological adjustments in the make-up of the worshipper, nor the mouthing of empty phrases.(153) The worshipper should, of course, experience change as a result of worshipping. Something should happen in that personal relationship, which is both an individual and a corporate event, to effect change in the worshipper's way of living. Otherwise the giving of allegiance by blessing God would be an empty gesture. However, it is also true that the mutuality of the relationship between God and his children means that God too is affected by blessing. God wills a free relationship with his sons and daughters. The whole of

---

148. see 9.5.3 below

149. see pp 95,131,136-138,166,180,201

150. cf 1 Samuel 25, 2 Samuel 8.9-14, Ruth 2.19; pp 161-163

151. cf the encounter between Jacob and Pharaoh [Genesis 47.7,10]

152. Hiram and Sheba exhort others to bless Yahweh. They are not themselves declaring themselves to be his worshippers.

153. see the commentary on Psalm 10.3; pp 194-196



Deuteronomy is a testimony to the seriousness of the choice that God allows them to make. It is between life and death, blessing and curse.(154)

It is a source of joy to God when that relationship is accepted and given expression in worship.(155) The theology of blessing demonstrates the capacity of God for experiencing joy in and with his creation.(156) It is at this point in the argument that the linguistic evidence is important and that the commentator must beware of his or her theological presuppositions. As indicated above,(157) Mowinckel believed that, in origin at least, blessing Yahweh was in fact a way of increasing his power and might.(158) The ancient gods even needed food, so that material gifts were offered in sacrifice for their sustenance. There can be no doubt that the writers of the books of the Old Testament moved beyond such a magical notion of what happens in blessing God. Blessing itself was submitted to the control of Yahweh. He is the true source of it, the one who carries it into effect, and when it is a question of blessing Yahweh, the root meaning of blessing is "to praise".

The evidence of the Septuagint is here significant. Whilst in linguistic terms the expression בָּרַךְ יְהוָה certainly includes the possibility of ascribing an increase in power to Yahweh when he is blessed, the theological decision taken by the Septuagint translators in using

---

154. see especially Deuteronomy 30.19-20; cf pp 93-94

155. cf Psalm 69.30-31

156. cf Psalm 147.11; 149.4

157. see pp 37-41

158. MOWINCKEL Psalmenstudien V 27

"...es im letzten Grunde überhaupt Zweck des Kultes ist, die Macht und die Kraft der Gottheit zu steigern und zu erhöhen."

εὐλογητός for blessing God and εὐλογημένος for human beings makes it clear that God is being praised for what he is. The analysis of בָּרַךְ יְהוָה in the Psalms (159) demonstrates that it is normally a statement of praise to Yahweh, indicative in mood, describing those dimensions of the being of God which are abiding and permanent. God is "my rock" (160) because he is secure and unchangable. He is good; his love is from everlasting to everlasting.(161) God is always righteous.(162) He is faithful and true.(163) It is God's unvarying desire that his creation should prosper under his blessing.(164) All these things are everlasting certainties which guarantee the stability of the relationship which Yahweh offers to his creatures, for he is not a whimsical or capricious God.(165)

Relational categories are difficult to reconcile with the immutability of the wholly other, transcendent God. At the same time it is easy to make the involved God of blessing contingent upon the world he has made in such a way that he is no longer God. However, the many strands of the Hebrew scriptures require us to take both dimensions seriously. God is both awesome in his holiness and intimately related to his creation. The living relationship in which human beings experience blessing is with the God whose glory the heavens declare.(166). It is in this context that prayer has a place as a God-given means of allowing human beings to communicate with him and to cooperate with his

---

159. pp 189-192

160. Psalms 18.47 & 144.1; pp 189-190

161. cf Psalm 100.5

162. cf Psalm 119.137-144

163. see Psalm 89

164. see Genesis 9; p 117. cf also Psalm 133.3

165. cf the litany in Psalm 136 כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ.

166. cf Psalm 19.1

purposes.

In such a context even the giving of physical, material gifts in blessing God, the first-fruits of the harvest and the tithe, makes perfectly consistent sense. God does not need food and clothing and the material gifts which blessing involves for human beings. However, as well as the rôle these things have in meeting the needs of the poor according to God's own law,(167) these gifts are further evidence of God's desire for a free relationship with his creation in that he himself supplies the means to make it possible.(168) God's relationship is with the whole created world and it is therefore in no way strange that physical objects should be brought to bless God their Creator. "The earth is the LORD's and the fulness thereof..."(169) The goal of all creation is the worship of God. "Make a joyful noise to the LORD all the earth... Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth."(170) Blessing God, worship itself, is an eschatological activity. It is a foretaste of the end-time when everything will be in accordance with God's will and purposes.(171)

### 9.5.3 Positive relationships in human society

One aspect of God's presence with his world needs to be emphasized. God's blessing presence creates community. Blessing is something

---

167. see Deuteronomy 26.12; p 94

168. see p 225

169. Psalm 24.1

170. Psalm 98.4,7-9a

171. see Isaiah 65.23, p 207; cf also Genesis 2.3 & Leviticus 25; p 133



experienced in solidarity with other people.(172) Because God's bounty is for the whole human race elaborate provision is made for the needs of those who do not share at first hand in the plenty which God supplies.(173) For anyone to rejoice in his or her own wealth without awareness of the needs of others is to fail to understand the community nature of blessing.(174)

In the Hebrew scriptures it is often difficult to distinguish between individual and community concerns, so easily do the writers move from the one category to the other because the two are interconnected.(175) In this respect the king is very special. He is a representative person, mediating blessing to the whole people. The well-being of the nation is, as has been repeatedly illustrated in chapters 3-8, closely bound up with the fortunes of its ruler. The Psalms in particular are concerned with the prosperity of the monarch and his house because the king's blessing is something reflected in the total life of the nation.(176) It is something shared. The king has a mediating rôle in communicating blessing to the people.

The priests too have a special function.(177) Although in the early days of the monarchy the king was able to bless the people this particular function became more and more the especial prerogative of the priesthood. They were designated to bless *בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה*, i.e. to speak with the authority of Yahweh in the belief that the blessing will be carried into effect by him. *בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה* can simply be a synonym for

---

172. pp 56-57,81-82,83,102,105,107,115,168,169,201

173. pp 94,99-101,104,105,107

174. pp 102,105,107,201

175. cf Psalm 28, pp 182-183

176. cf pp 171-172

177. see pp 123 129, cf also Deuteronomy 10.6-8;18.5,7; pp 97-101

Yahweh, another way of speaking of God's presence.(178) It can mean "to worship" as in the expression: "...we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever."(179) It can also be used to express ownership. "...and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD".(180) However, in many places where *בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה* appears it has connotations of power. David went against Goliath *בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה*, in the strength of Yahweh.(181) Yahweh will protect his people. "They shall seek refuge *בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה*."(182) When it comes to pronouncing words *בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה*, they are effective words precisely because they are declared in the name of Yahweh. The priests speak with authority and power. It is their allotted task to bless those who come into their orbit.

A further sign of a positive blessing-relationship is to be found in the giving of gifts. To offer a gift is to offer a shared relationship. When Esau accepted his brother's impressive gift, he accepted a relationship with him. To have refused the gift, even on the grounds that he did not need it, would have been to refuse to be reconciled with his brother.(183) Giving a gift may be the paying of tribute but that too is the acceptance of a relationship.(184) The gift is a sign of interdependence.

Wealth is normally taken to be a concrete sign of blessing. Rebekah's family acknowledges that Abraham has been blessed by God when they

---

178. cf Isaiah 50.10

179. Micah 4.5

180. 1 Kings 18.32

All of this is admirably plotted by H.A. BRONGERS "Die Wendung *bēšēm jhwh* im Alten Testament"

181. 1 Samuel 17.45

182. Zephaniah 3.12

183. Genesis 33, pp 66-67

184. cf 2 Samuel 8.9-14, pp 161-162

see the size of the gift his servant has brought.(185) However, the sages of the Book of Proverbs make it plain that wealth can only be considered to be the blessing of God when the one who possesses it lives in relation to God and uses it for the benefit of the whole community.(186) When someone is described as *בָּרוּךְ לַיהוָה*, there is often the implication that he or she visibly belongs to Yahweh.(187) Belonging to God radiates from such people in a well-being which enlightens others. It spills over from them to include other people,(188) for the presence of God binds people together to share the blessing which flows from his covenant love.

#### 9.6 The performance of blessing

In Leviticus 9 Aaron and his sons are given instruction concerning the correct performance of sacrifice. The outcome is disastrous when Nadab and Abihu, two of Aaron's sons, do not follow the prescribed procedure. They offer "unholy fire before the LORD, such as he had not commanded them".(189) They themselves are consumed by the fire. There is a right and a wrong way of carrying out this religious duty. The need for special knowledge in order to perform particular duties in the correct way sets the possessors of that knowledge apart from ordinary people and gives them a status relating to their particular function. Setting out a right and a wrong way of offering sacrifice is a way of enhancing the reputation and standing of the priesthood. Is there similarly a right and a wrong way of blessing?

---

185. Genesis 24, pp 61-62

186. cf pp 175-178,193,196,201

187. cf Ruth 2.20;3.10; 1 Samuel 15.13

188. Laban is enriched by the blessing which overflows from Jacob. Potiphar and Pharaoh prosper because Joseph is blessed.

189. Leviticus 10.1



### 9.6.1 The blessing of living things

#### A. Who may bless?

Blessing is first and foremost an activity of God. God is the source of blessing, so that whoever may utter the specific words, they have their origin and their fulfilment in him. In countless contexts it is stated that "God blessed..." Although in the Yahwist's teaching blessing is dependent upon human obedience to God's will, it is experienced as a gift from God. It is God's summons to a particular course of action which results in him giving good gifts. He commands Abraham to leave his home-land; Abraham obeys; God blesses him. Once made, God's blessing-promises become the over-arching concept under which everything else is done.<sup>(190)</sup> They are the climate in which God's servants flourish. Just as the Deuteronomist's record of his people's history is telescoped to heighten awareness of Yahweh's guidance,<sup>(191)</sup> so the conditional nature of blessing is stressed to make plain the people's dependence on God for the maintenance of the fabric of life. It is God who provides for their needs.<sup>(192)</sup> Even in the Priestly writings where blessing is to be distinguished from the good things which are its content, where it is the potential for thriving latent within living things, it is God who makes it actual.

When God himself is praised, blessing Yahweh is a response to what he has already done. It is God's past faithfulness and munificent

---

190. see pp 55-56

191. NORTH 92-106

192. pp 101-102

provision for his people's needs which elicit blessing-worship.(193) Although the praise may have as its object the fulfilment of a request, it is on the basis of what God himself has done in the past. Even when men and women bless each other it is God who is asked to supply what is required. Blessing is primarily what God does since it is his intention in creating that what he has made shall prosper. The witness of the Yahwist agrees with the testimony of the Deuteronomists and of the Priestly writers that God wants his handiwork to flourish.

Having established that God is the fountainhead of blessing, who else may bless? The short answer must be everybody, provided that it is done "in the name of Yahweh". There are particular people who may be expected to speak words of blessing and there are specific contexts in which it may be anticipated that an act of blessing will take place. Blessing may take place one to one, as when Isaac blesses Jacob.(194) One person may bless a group, as when David and Solomon each bless the people. A group or congregation may bless an individual. The response of the congregation to David and Solomon is to bless them in their turn.(195) There is a mutuality about blessing, made clear in the Wisdom literature, which means that a rich or powerful person may bless others and in the process be enriched himself.(196) It remains possible for those who are "subject" to bless those who are in sociological terms their superiors.

The statement that everybody may bless needs, however, some

---

193. cf Genesis 24.27,34; Deuteronomy 8.1-10

194. Genesis 27

195. cf 1 Kings 8.14,55 & 8.66

196. Job 29.13; Proverbs 22.9

qualification because there is clear evidence in the Hebrew scriptures that there are people whose special concern it is to bless. There can be no doubt, for example, that in the Priestly writings there is a movement towards the institutionalization of blessing and that in the post-exilic period it came to be considered an especial prerogative of the priests. This can, however, only relate to cultic contexts for there is absolutely no doubt that in ordinary everyday terms people blessed each other in greeting, in parting, and in terms of offering thanks for a gift or generous act. The growing importance attached to priestly blessing does not render the ordinary and everyday meaningless.

A more serious qualification of the statement that everybody may bless relates to the recognition that blessing stems from God. Words of blessing must spring out of a relationship with Yahweh, if they are to have any meaning. It is possible for someone who is not a worshipper of Yahweh [Hiram, king of Tyre, or the Queen of Sheba] to honour Israel's God by calling upon others to offer him praise and thanksgiving. It is possible for Yahweh to assimilate the blessing of "God Most High, maker of heaven and earth" uttered by Melchizedek,(197) for that is who he is, even though Melchizedek does not worship him as Yahweh. That blessing is, however, also a blessing of Abraham and is no innocent insertion in the text.(198) As well as these foreigners there are still others who do not live out of a relationship with Yahweh. The wicked do not keep God's commandments nor do they live as if in his presence. Those, for example, who think that their wealth is the result of their own hard work and who do not recognize God as the source of their prosperity are self-deceived

---

197. Genesis 14.19-20

198. see p 238



when they claim blessing for themselves. They cannot be a means of blessing others, for they are turned in upon themselves and their blessing literally has no content.(199) Blessing addressed to Yahweh, whether in his praise or asking him to grant a petition, is only significant within a living relationship.

There are, however, particular people who may be expected to bless. Fathers, for example, may be expected to bless their children. The Genesis stories, both in the J and the P strands, are concerned with the transfer of inheritance from one generation to another through the blessing of the father on his son. This happens in the case of Isaac blessing Jacob.(200) It takes place one to one. It is a formal act with the set purpose of making arrangements for what will happen after the death of Isaac. Although it is Isaac's intention to bless his first-born son, Jacob receives the blessing. In spite of Mowvley's assertion that "the divine blessing, so obviously and closely connected with the Promise, is normally handed on to the first-born son", (201) Isaac does not in fact bless Esau. In terms of the promise to Abraham God blesses Isaac. Ishmael, his older half-brother, receives a blessing of his own but Isaac is the one designated as bearer of the promise. Jacob blesses Joseph through both his sons,(202) although built into the story is the notion that the younger will be more powerful than the elder, which may be a reflection of the actual political situation in the time of the Priestly writers or they may be establishing a propaganda point on behalf of Ephraim concerning the political precedence of the

---

199. Psalm 49.16-20

200. Genesis 27

201. MOWVLEY 76

202. contra MOWVLEY who claims that "when Israel blessed Joseph's sons [Gen.48] he quite deliberately blessed Joseph through the younger son". 76

Ephraimites over Manasseh.

Further, whilst it is true that under the monarchy it became the norm for the first-born son to inherit the throne, at the beginning no hereditary principle was established. David, the son of Jesse, succeeds Saul. Solomon is succeeded in the north by someone who is not his son. Nor did being born first guarantee the succession. David is followed by Solomon who is not his first-born. Nevertheless, the central concern in the blessing of children by their father is the need to establish the legitimate heir. Blessing him serves as a statement of last will and testament.

In the curious episode recorded in Judges 17.2 a mother blesses her son to cancel a curse that she has unwittingly called down upon his head. The construction of the blessing [בָּרוּךְ בְּנִי לַיהוָה] makes it clear that it is to Yahweh's good offices that her son is commended.<sup>(203)</sup> Otherwise, the rôle of the mother in blessing seems to be limited to making sure that she gets her own way. Rebekah seeks to ensure that her favourite son is heir. In a polygamous household, Bathsheba manipulates events to procure the throne for her son rather than allow it to pass to the son of one of her rivals.

In the patriarchal stories it is clear that fathers bless their children when bequeathing the family property. Both Isaac and Jacob are not long for this world when the blessings take place. Isaac is old and blind. Jacob's blessing of Joseph's sons is specifically presented as a death-bed scene. Pedersen claims that the blessing of the dying is especially potent. Blessing is a "soul-substance". "From the fathers he

has received it, and to the sons he passes it on saying it into them before his death. It is the blessing within himself which he passes on."(204) Isaac even has to have a meal to build up his strength before passing the blessing to his son.(205) The words of those not far from death would, however, be closely heeded precisely because they are the last wishes of a revered member of the family. They would be remembered especially clearly because they were last words and particularly noted because they made solemn dispositions for the future through the declaration of the dying person's will. That in itself would make the words of a dying man "ein wirksames Segenswort".(206)

The head of the family blesses the family by virtue of the fact that blessing is inherently something shared. The king is in a real sense father of the people and he too may bless. David and Solomon pronounced blessing on the people in a cultic setting.(207) The people are also blessed in that they share in the king's prosperity. When things go well with David his subjects flourish too. The king is a bearer of blessing.

Priests and levites represent another group who may be expected to be mediators of God's blessing. Nevertheless, whilst there was a growing institutionalization of blessing after the Exile, a pointing to "official channels" within the cultus, this did not preclude blessing

---

204. PEDERSEN 199

See also MOWINCKEL 8

205. see HEMPEL 56 "Es ist seine Lebenskraft, die er hingibt."

See below for a discussion of the substantive nature of the word, Pedersen's "family heirloom" which passes "through the souls, from generation to generation".

206. MOWINCKEL Psalmenstudien V 10

207. 2 Samuel 6.19 = 1 Chronicles 16.2 & 1 Kings 8.14,55



being performed by other people in appropriate settings.(208) With Klaus Seybold it is possible to maintain that God has in a significant way put himself in the hands of human beings, specifically the priesthood, with regard to whether blessing is offered or refused.(209) He is prepared to put himself in the hands of human beings and to allow himself to be restricted by them and their actions. His gift of freedom to the people he has made implies at least the possibility that they will make real choices, for or against him. It remains nevertheless unlikely even within the Sitz im Leben of Numbers 6 that the performance of blessing could be restricted to the priests alone. It is their sole prerogative within the cult to bless but it is in the name of Yahweh that they do it. "Yahweh bless you and keep you" [Numbers 6.24]. They had a special responsibility laid upon them to bless. They were in a real sense the true heirs of David and Solomon in this respect. There is no evidence in relation to other kings that they blessed the people in worship. Certainly in the period after the Exile when the Priestly writers see little prospect of earthly power through the monarchy, the priests become the vehicle of a blessing which can be experienced in the focussed presence of God in the reconstructed Temple. However, to claim that *nobody else* after the Exile was permitted to bless would take no account of how deeply blessing permeates the fabric of ordinary everyday life. Blessing is not restricted to those who are present at the focal act of worship in the Temple in Jerusalem. It is God's intention for the whole people, and if Numbers 6 is read in the light of Genesis 1, for the whole human race.

---

208. pp 123-129

209. SEYBOLD 66

There is no difficulty in asserting that in hierarchical terms a superior may bless an inferior. There are many examples of this in the Hebrew scriptures. David and Solomon bless their subjects. The head of the family blesses other members of the family. Those who are blessed share in the prosperity of the one who blesses. In supreme terms God blesses his people. He causes them to flourish. The situation is, however, not quite so straightforward when it is asked if an inferior may bless a superior. In what way may subjects cause their king to prosper? In what sense can a human being add anything to God or cause him happiness?

A subject by blessing a social superior is first and foremost acknowledging a relationship, usually of dependence, with the one blessed and professing allegiance. When the courtiers bless/congratulate David on the choice of Solomon to succeed him they are implicitly acknowledging Solomon's right to their service.(210) When Joab blesses David for allowing Absalom back at court, he is clearly thanking the king for acceding to the request laid before him by the woman of Tekoa. He is also reaffirming his allegiance to David. Mowinckel characteristically finds in Joab's obeisance the increase of David's stock of blessing.(211) Words of blessing, which may be praise, congratulation or thanksgiving, may also be accompanied by a gift. Toi, king of Hamath, sends his son Joram to bless [congratulate/thank] David on the occasion of his victory over Hadadezer and gives him a

---

210. 1 Kings 1.47

211. MOWINCKEL Psalmenstudien V 7

"...geben auch die Kleinen dem Grossen, dem Häuptling Segen, 'segnen' ihn und bestätigen und steigern dadurch tatsächlich seinen Segensbesitz."

gift. The gift is a form of tribute and giving it an act of homage.(212)  
It increases the number of David's subjects and enriches him.

In some situations it is not clear who is hierarchically the superior. When the King of Sodom and Melchizedek meet Abraham and the king of Salem blesses Abraham and offers him bread and wine, it would appear that Abraham is the superior.(213) However, Abraham then gives Melchizedek a tenth of everything and in so doing seems to be acknowledging allegiance to him. If in the meeting between Jacob and Pharaoh in Genesis 47 the blessing is more than greeting and parting, then Jacob ought to be considered the inferior. He is simply paying his respects to the Egyptian ruler. If on the other hand a theological point is being made, namely that the Pharaoh is blessed by the son of the Promise, then the intention of the story is to assert that of the two Jacob is the greater. Whichever may be the greater and whichever the lesser in these two stories, there are sufficient examples of the subject blessing a superior to demonstrate that the subject by giving allegiance increases the reputation of the one to whom it is offered. The blessing of the subject augments the standing of the ruler and makes him more powerful by virtue of increasing the number of his followers and making him wealthier by the bringing of tribute to demonstrate continuing support.(214)

Friedrich Horst, writing in 1947 in the wake of Pedersen, Hempel and Beyer, expressed the belief that "Menschen bedürfen zum Segnen einer besonderen »Ermächtigung«. Nicht jeder kann ein wirkungsmächtiges

---

212. 2 Samuel 8.9-14

213. Genesis 14

214. see pp 263-264



Wort aussprechen."(215) He himself acknowledges that this endowment with power [Machtbegabtheit] of particular people belongs to the world of magic. Whilst there are people like Balaam who are in Horst's terms "machtbegabte Menschen", they can only use their power at the behest of Yahweh. The biblical writers in every strand of the Hebrew scriptures understand blessing to belong peculiarly to Yahweh. Nobody can bless without God's permission but that permission is granted to those who live their lives within the covenant. It is a permission that they exercise not only at the milestones of life, at the birth of a child or at weddings, but also in the very fabric of everyday living. None the less the truth in Horst's position is that within the Hebrew scriptures there is some evidence for the transmission of special power and authority through the laying-on of hands which commissions and empowers specific people to a particular task, so that they utter "an effective word" precisely because it is in the name of Yahweh, i.e. with his specific authority.(216)

#### B. Physical posture and ritual action

In christian terms, it is possible to signal without words that blessing is taking place, by use of the sign of the Cross.(217) There is no evidence that in Old Testament terms wordless blessing is possible. When God blesses a person, in the sense of causing him or her to prosper, there is no need to suppose that God has to say anything. However, as far as human beings are concerned, there is no indication in the Hebrew text that it is possible to bless by gesture alone. The

---

215. HORST 36

216. see below pp 281-282

217. Hence the German "segnen" from the Latin "signare" to make the sign of the Cross.

evidence concerning the way in which blessing was received and concerning the actions accompanying the dispensing of blessing is fragmentary. It is hazardous to build too much on it in establishing norms.

It would be quite wrong, for example, to suppose that everybody prostrated themselves in the act of blessing a king on the basis of what Joab did in thanking David for authorizing the return of Absalom to his court.(218) It was because he was making an act of obeisance that he prostrated himself. It did not have any necessary connection with the blessing. Similarly when Abraham's servant found the woman who was to be the wife of Isaac, he "bowed his head and worshiped the LORD, and said: "Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham..."(219) Bowing his head belongs more probably to the fact that he is engaged in worship rather than having any integral connection with the blessing of God.

Again, as has been maintained throughout this work, *context is important*. The mood of the prayer or praise addressed to Yahweh may influence the accompanying gestures or physical posture. Raising the hands may be a physical expression of reaching out to God.(220) Prostration on the ground may most eloquently speak of self-abasement, whereas kneeling may be the most suitable position in which to receive the laying-on of the hands of someone standing over the one to be blessed. That kneeling itself is the most appropriate physical attitude in which to receive the laying-on of hands in blessing

---

218. 2 Samuel 14.22

219. Genesis 24.26-27

see also Genesis 24.48 & 52 and Nehemiah 8.6

220. cf Psalm 63.4

is often affirmed but there is remarkably little evidence that this was in fact how it was performed.(221) We have the evidence of Genesis 48 that Jacob took his grandsons on his knees (222) and that he kissed and embraced them. "Then Joseph removed them from his knees... [v.12]" and guided the hands of the old patriarch towards his children, the right hand towards Manasseh and the left to Ephraim. Jacob, however, insists on putting his right hand on Ephraim and the left on Manasseh to signify that Ephraim will in fact be the more powerful of the two. The right hand is clearly understood to give the more potent blessing.

As Johannes Behm insists the laying-on of hands is the communication [Übertragung] of blessing, as well as a method of healing and of authorizing for office.(223) There is a transfer of power from the one to the other. Although there is no suggestion in the context that it is a blessing, when Elisha lays his hands on the hands of Joash, the king receives the strength of the dying prophet to fire "the LORD's arrow of victory... over Syria".(224) One of the clearest examples of the laying-on of hands being the empowerment and installation in office of a new leader is the case of Joshua. "And the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your

---

221. for a discussion of the linguistic connection between בְּרִכָּה and בָּרַךְ, see pp 13-16

222. Some writers claim that taking the boys on his knees is not just an expression of affection but is also a sign that Jacob has adopted them. Joseph then bows down in gratitude before his father.

cf von RAD Genesis 410

223. BEHM 119-120,138-139

224. 2 Kings 13.14-19

see BEHM 120

"Durch Handauflegung entsteht eine geistige Ansteckung und Zeugung; der Geist des Höheren und Heiligen geht über auf den Schwachen und Unheiligen und wird ihm zum Segen."



hand upon him; cause him to stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and you shall commission him in their sight."(225) The laying-on of hands appears to be the main element in this commissioning of Joshua to succeed Moses.(226)

So, too, physical proximity is required for blessing to take place both in the story of Jacob blessing Joseph's sons(227) and in the story of Jacob's own blessing by Isaac.(228) It is sometimes suggested that in both cases this is because of the very poor eye-sight of Isaac and Jacob at the time. It is, however, not necessary to conclude that blessing by the blind is more efficacious than by the sighted. In fact, blessing is such a serious matter that it is desirable to be able to see the one to be blessed, as also Balaam needs to be able to see those he is asked to curse. However, as in other situations where power and authority are transmitted, as in healing and commissioning for a specific task, the laying-on of hands is understood to be an integral part of the ritual of blessing and an effective communication of the necessary gifts for the work to be done. The recipient of blessing becomes "machtbegabt".

In the cult, however, the priest, as one given the task of transmitting blessing to the people, cannot lay his hands on each individual worshipper. Leviticus 9.22 affords a brief insight into the way in

---

225. Numbers 27.18,19f

226. see Deuteronomy 34.9

227. Genesis 48.10 "So Joseph brought them near him..."

228. Genesis 27.21-22,26

cf MOWINCKEL Psalmenstudien V 9

"Im Allgemeinen ist die körperliche Nähe eine Vorbedingung einer wirksamen Segensübertragung [vergl. Isak und Jakob]. Durch die körperliche Berührung wird die Kraftüberführung vermittelt."

which blessing was therefore performed in a liturgical setting. "Aaron lifted his hands towards the people..." There can be little doubt that hands uplifted over the assembled congregation represents the hands placed on the head of an individual receiving blessing.(229) The one is the other distributed.

Proximity, however, implies that there will be actual physical contact. "Come near and kiss me, my son," says Isaac. "So he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him..."(230) Hempel characteristically maintains that "der Kuss ist ja von Haus aus nichts anderes als eine Form der Mitteilung der Lebenskraft".(231) This is to claim too much. In the specific situations where a kiss is mentioned in connection with a blessing it is normally a simple expression of affection. When Jacob kisses his grandchildren it is a tender gesture towards children who do not know their grandfather and needs no further explanation.(232) When Laban kisses his daughters and his grandchildren similarly it is adequately understood as a parting embrace.(233) When David kissed Barzillai and took his leave of him [וַיִּבְרַךְ־הוּא] the king was showing for all to see his kind disposition towards a frail old man. No further explanation is necessary.(234)

However, in the case of Genesis 27, Isaac's insistence that his son

---

229. HORST 27

"Wo es nicht zum Auflegen der Hand oder der Hände kommt, muss mindestens ein Erheben der Hand geschehen."

230. Genesis 27.26-27

231. HEMPEL 56

232. Genesis 48

233. Genesis 31.55

234. 2 Samuel 19.39

should come close and kiss him is because he harboured a suspicion that something was wrong. He wanted to be reassured that "you really are my son Esau...[27.21]" His doubts about who this is in front of him are calmed by the hairy hand and the smell of the garments of Esau. The kiss is a device to get his son to approach him and not a part of the act of blessing. In fact, it is only in so far as a kiss is a part of the ritual of greeting and parting that it may be said to be a part of blessing, this not in terms of the transfer of soul-substance but as an expression of tender affection, usually within the bounds of the family.

A final feature of the story of Isaac blessing Jacob which needs to be mentioned can be dealt with swiftly. Because blessing someone involves a significant expenditure of energy Isaac needs to gather his strength before blessing his son. He therefore asks Esau to prepare tasty food for him to eat. Hempel speaking of the transfer of the life force in blessing claims that "Die Natur des verspeisten Tieres schliesst den Gedanken an ein Opfer aus; es ist die Lebenskraft des erlegten Wildes, die der Sterbende gewinnen will, die eigene zu stärken".(235) Whilst the context warrants the conclusion that Isaac needs to build up his strength for what is about to happen, the notion that he is taking over the life force of the game he has asked Esau to prepare goes far beyond the text and there is no real suggestion that the preparation of the food has any sacrificial connotations.

### C. The words spoken in blessing

It is not possible to claim that the words used in blessing had any set or fixed form, except in two respects, first of all in the blessing of



God by his followers where the  $\text{בְּרַךְ יְהוָה}$  formula provides the basis of praise, and secondly in the words of the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6.(236) Otherwise petitions for the well-being of those blessed vary from context to context according to the desired object of the prayer. Once again, however, it must be stressed that what is said is uttered  $\text{בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה}$ , where blessing in his name means "at the command of" or "with the authority of the LORD" and where the name is a synonym for power.(237) One possible interpretation of Genesis 12.3, if the niph'al of  $\text{בְּרַךְ}$  is translated reflexively, is that it gives permission to use the name of Abraham in praying to be blessed as he was blessed. Such prayer would always be addressed to God who alone can fulfill the request. However, it is more probable that the niph'al form is intended to describe a climate of blessing rather than encouraging the use of Abraham's name in blessing formulas. It is the name of Yahweh which is supremely important.

Although there are remarkably few references to the root  $\text{בְּרַךְ}$  in the writings of the prophets they all have a tremendous sense of speaking in the name of Yahweh. God's word is a burden laid upon them which drives them to say: "Thus says the LORD..."(238) They have no doubt that God's word is an effective word.(239) "...it shall accomplish that which I purpose and prosper in the things for which I sent it."(240) Such might be a description of the word of blessing. It is a word of power which achieves what God intends it to achieve. Once spoken the word of blessing "does" something. It is no nebulous well-wishing but

---

236. see pp 125-129

237. BRONGERS 18-19

238. cf Isaiah 56.1

239. cf Isaiah 55.10-11

240. Isaiah 55.11b

neither is it magical. Blessing would only be a magical concept if it were a means of manipulating God to do what he would not otherwise do. Blessing is an effective word because God's purposes will ultimately prevail and because blessing is in accordance with his purposes.

The claim that the word of blessing cannot be recalled and that it is therefore irrevocable owes much to the Genesis 27 account of Isaac blessing Jacob. Within the limits of this story told by the Yahwist Isaac's words cannot be rescinded. The Yahwist wanted to claim that the blessing of Jacob had permanent validity in order to give a theological rationale for the preeminence of the descendants of Jacob over the surrounding nations at the time of the monarchy. Such a claim would be much more difficult to sustain on the Deuteronomist's understanding of blessing where the conditional element is strong, where God's blessing will accompany the people provided that they are obedient to God's commandments and walk in his ways.

The problem for the modern commentator is clearly perceived by Reinhard Wonneberger when he identifies two kinds of blessing, one which is "Segenswunsch" and another which is "der explizit-performative Segen". Blessing-petition [Segenswunsch] is the expression of a wish that the object of the prayer should prosper. It is only a problem in the measure that any form of petitionary prayer is a problem. The other way of understanding blessing, the belief that something happens in the act of blessing itself [explizit-performativ] is illustrated by Wonneberger by reference to Genesis 27. He contends that the present-day president over the liturgy feels caught in his understanding of blessing between something which he cannot accept in a strictly performative sense and wanting to use a ritual act for the

benefit of the worshipping community.(241) The tension can only be resolved if blessing is understood to be a statement of God's intention and the promise that it will be fulfilled. "...and I will bless you." The performative element in the act of blessing is the inclusion of the one blessed within the universal scope of God's will for his creation. "...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."(242)

There is in the Genesis stories a certain "stuffness" about blessing which enables Pedersen to compare it to a "family heirloom" which passes "through the souls, from generation to generation".(243) Mowinckel too writes in the same vein.(244) It is beyond dispute that blessing in the Hebrew scriptures is portrayed in terms of physical prosperity, good crops, thriving herds, and material wealth. The blessing of Jacob in Genesis 27 is understood in the immediate context precisely in these terms. There is, however, in blessing someone, not simply a wish for their prosperity and well-being. There is also a commitment to a relationship, for blessing someone makes little sense apart from a relationship. What is true in the perspective of the Scandinavian and German scholars active in the 1920's and 1930's, with all their talk of blessing being the transfer of soul-substance, is

---

241. WONNEBERGER 1077

"Die Widersprüchlichkeiten des Segens lassen sich also mit linguistischen Mitteln genau beschreiben. So lässt sich erhellen, warum sich mancher Liturg und wohl auch mancher Gottesdienstbesucher in einer *double-bind*-Situation befindet: voll verstehen und bejahen kann er den Segen nicht; ablehnen kann er aber auch nicht, weil er ihm nicht nur als helfendes Ritual, sondern auch als geistlicher Zuspruch lieb geworden ist."

242. Genesis 12.1-3

243. PEDERSEN I 193

244. MOWINCKEL Psalmstudien V 9

"Jede Kraft und Kraftwirkung, und so auch den Segen, hat das alte Israel dinglich und materiell aufgefasst."



that a living relationship involves the giving of a part of one's self, which in the Hebrew scriptures is expressed in very solid, physical terms. Blessing is fundamentally a relational concept. It belongs to the area of worship when addressed to Yahweh but includes offering to him material gifts. It is a concept which creates a community in which human beings wish good things for each other and share God's bounty, according to the law, with the poor, the widow and the orphan.

#### D. The blessing of flocks and herds and crops

In the Priestly account of creation on the third day God created vegetation, plants and trees "in which is their seed, each according to its kind." (245) Then on the fifth day he created swarms of living creatures, birds and great sea monsters. These he blessed and commanded: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." (246) On the sixth he created "cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth". All share with the human race the ability to reproduce their own kind. The Priestly understanding of God's blessing is potential fruitfulness and the possibility of multiplying. (247) There is therefore nothing strange or incoherent about asking God to bless flocks and herds and even crops. To pray to God for the increase of cattle, sheep and goats, to ask God to make actual the potential within all of them is to share with them the blessing of fertility which is also ours.

---

245. Genesis 1.11

246. Genesis 1.22

247. cf MOWVLEY 75

"...when God blessed the birds and fish [Gen. 1:22] and man [Gen. 1:28], it was the power to be fruitful which He gave to them and not the fruit itself. Nevertheless that potentiality must be actualized."

### 9.6.2 The blessing of "inanimate" objects

#### A. Blessing, consecration or dedication

Because, according to Mowinckel, ancient Israel understood blessing, like other manifestations of power, in a very objective [dinglich] and material way, it is possible to say that blessing can be enclosed or embodied in physical objects. It is not difficult to understand how the juice within the grape might be thought to be the "soul substance", the vital part, the life within the grape. In this sense it is possible to talk of the grape containing or possessing "blessing". Nor is it hard to understand how water, rain showers or moving stream and spring, might be thought to be living things, with their own special vitality.(248) After all water is necessary to the fructifying process. Without it everything remains barren. Water too might be described as possessing blessing. "The showers of blessing" of Ezekiel 34.26 symbolize abundant harvests which will ensure the well-being of the people.(249) Not only do they have this blessing-life within them, they also dispense blessing.(250)

The earth too is a part of this life-giving process yielding blessing. Like water it is a living thing, bringing forth its harvest. "Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless thy people Israel and the ground which thou hast given us, as thou didst swear to our

---

248. MOWINCKEL 9

"Die Traube hat »Segen« d.h. dem Sinne nach Saft, in sich, sie besitzt eine Kraft, die, einem jeden sichtbar, gesteigerte Lebens- und Kraftgefühl mit sich bringt; die Regengüsse tragen den Segen Jahwä's zur Erde herunter."

249. FISCH 234

250. see Psalm 65.9-13

fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey."(251) Blessing is the result of bringing seed and earth and water together. It signifies all those things which are experienced as God's gift which go to make life good and enjoyable. It has furthermore the additional connotation of abundance, not just "enough" but "more than enough", "a land flowing with milk and honey". Yet that very abundance has its dangers, for in the midst of plenty it is easy to forget its source.(252)

"Blessing the ground" is a prayer asking God to make actual the potential within it. It is a plea that it be fertile. The earth, the seed and the rain have within them life-enhancing properties [their blessing] which have to be realised. In Exodus 23.25 the people are told: "You shall serve the LORD your God, and I [Hebrew: he] will bless your bread and water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of you." Bread and water are things which have the capacity for promoting life. For God to bless them is for him to help them achieve that end. The promise of blessing in Deuteronomy 28.2-6 is all embracing. It includes the blessing of the basket and the kneading trough. Just as it is the blessing of the grape to contain juice, so it is the blessing of the basket and the kneading trough that they should hold the fruit of the earth. Their blessing is that they should be full and therein contain the possibility of enriching life.

In a similar vein God will bless "the work of your hands" in so far as what the hands produce is life-enhancing. "The work of your hands" is a synecdoche, meaning God will bless "you" in the measure that what you do or make is for the benefit of humankind. It is in this same

---

251. Deuteronomy 26.15

252. see Deuteronomy 28.47-48



spirit that God blesses the sabbath. He creates space for the human race to have appropriate rest and thrive. In all the foregoing it is appropriate to speak of blessing, where blessing is the potential that these things possess for good. It is not inappropriate either to ask God to bless such things in terms of releasing that potential for the benefit of his children.

What the discussion of "things" reveals is the problematic nature of the title at the head of this section. When is an object "inanimate"? When it does not possess *anima*? (253) But to speak of the *anima* of things within the Hebrew scriptures would be to import a Latin concept into a Hebrew context, where to speak of *the blessing of a thing* is to say that it exists for a purpose. Not everything, however, possesses the ability to reproduce itself. Therein lies a fine distinction. In Hebrew terms something is "inanimate" if it does not have the seeds of its own continuance within it.

It is right that these things too should be received as God's gifts. "...all things come from thee, and of thy own have we given thee."(254) When David gathers together building materials for the Temple which he wants Solomon to build, he acknowledges that "all this abundance that we have provided for building thee a house for thy holy name comes from thy hand and is all thy own."(255) It is given back to God and set aside for a holy purpose. In English it would be preferable to speak in such cases of the *dedication* or the *consecration* [German:

---

253. cf R.B.ONIANS The Origins of European Thought CUP 1940 168-173 when he defines  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  and *anima/animus* in terms of a life-soul associated especially with the breath and breathing.

254. 1 Chronicles 29.14

255. 1 Chronicles 29.16

---

*Weihe*] of these things rather than of blessing of them. They can only be *blessed* when they are a metonymy for the human beings who will benefit from their existence or use.(256)

#### B. Human Solidarity with Things.

God himself has given special symbols of his presence. The Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant and, subsequently, the Temple are given to Israel as a reminder that God is with them to bless and protect them. The Ark and the Temple are places where God's presence is especially focussed. The worship offered there points forward to the theocracy of the end-time when everything will be under God's sovereign rule and he will be worshipped by the whole of his creation.

Further, in exploring the relationship between human beings and things, reference should be made to 2 Kings 4.29. It is much quoted as an example of how someone's soul-substance may permeate an object, in this case Elisha's staff. The son of the Shunammite woman is struck down in the fields where his father is at work. He is carried home, apparently dead. His mother causes him to be laid on the bed on which the prophet sleeps during his periodic visits to their home. This bed is presumably used precisely because of its association with someone who is recognized as possessing power. She then sets out to find Elisha. On seeing her distress the prophet sends his servant Gehazi on ahead to Shunem, with the instructions: "Gird up your loins, and take my staff in your hand, and go. If you meet any one, do not salute him; and if

---

256. The case of 1 Samuel 9.13 which is often described as the one place in the Old Testament where an object is blessed is best understood in this way, if it is not to be treated straightforwardly as an act of thanksgiving, a kind of grace before meals.

---

any one salutes you, do not reply; and lay my staff upon the face of the child."(257) Gehazi does as he is told, without result. The restoration of the child has to await the coming of the prophet himself.

Pedersen claims in relation to this episode: "Like all soul-substance the blessing can be put into a thing, penetrate what we call things just as well as it can penetrate a human body."(258) The greeting-character of the use of  $\text{ברך}$  in verse 29 is universally recognised (259) but most of the latest writers on blessing do not accept that a dynamistic understanding of blessing lies behind this episode.(260) Like Wehmeier and Mitchell many recognise that behind the instructions to Gehazi there lies a real sense of urgency, although the grounds adduced for the need for haste are varied.(261) Nevertheless the inner logic of the story requires that the staff given to Gehazi have, at least potentially, the power to fulfil its quasi-magical purpose. There is otherwise no reason for giving it to him. The idea of establishing a negative point by this method, i.e. to demonstrate, as Keil suggests, that the staff has no power, the story being told "to purify the faith of the people from erroneous ideas", is

---

257. 2 Kings 4.29

258. PEDERSEN 201

also MOWINCKEL 9

"Als Elischa seinen Knecht nach Sunem mit dem Stab des Propheten schickte, um mittels des Stabes den toten Sohn der Witwe zu erwecken, war es die Segenskraft des Gottesmannes, die im Stabe eingeschlossen war; das geht aus dem Befehl hervor, den der Knecht mit auf dem Wege nimmt: segne niemanden und nimm keinen Segen von irgend jemandem auf dem Wege: er darf nicht durch Segenswünsche an andere die Kraft des im Stabe verkörperten Segens vermindern, auch nicht den prophetischen Segen durch den Empfang des Segens anderer Leute alterieren."

259. WEHMEIER 156 et al

260. MITCHELL 108

261. JONES 409 et al

---



overly subtle. It makes the whole episode into an elaborate charade.(262) Pedersen, however, carries into another area the idea that the owner's blessing may penetrate his possessions.(263) Whenever anyone makes a gift, which is a way of entering into a relationship with that person, the gift includes something of the donor's own self and is therefore all the more precious. Understood in such a way blessing overcomes any dualistic separation of soul and body, of physical and spiritual. It makes it possible to keep a sense of the wholeness of creation. "Blessing characteristically treats people as wholes," writes Helen Oppenheimer.(264) It also holds together everything God has made and declares the good purposes for which he brought it into being.

#### 9.7 Theology or theologies ?

Having traced the development of the concept of blessing in the Hebrew scriptures it was asserted above (265) that unfinished thoughts and ideas are retained side by side because they all contain some aspect of the truth but they do not fit snugly together. They are not synthesized in any neat and tidy way and, although it is beyond the scope of this study, the process of change and development in understanding what constitutes blessing goes on. Such an analysis suggests a plurality of theologies rather than one single theology of blessing.

Certainly what the occurrences of the root 772 reveal in context

---

262. see KEIL 312-313

263. PEDERSEN I 201

264. in HARDY & SEDGWICK The Weight of Glory 225

265. p 254

---

concerning the content of blessing is that it has to be determined in each place what blessing is.(266) The only way in which the varied content of blessing can be spoken of in the singular is in terms of "that which contributes to the flourishing, prosperity, and well-being of God's creation".(267) It may be understood even within the same strand in terms of things as diverse as numerous descendants, the gift of the land of Canaan and military might [the Yahwist].(268) It may be great flocks and herds, freedom from sickness and destruction of the enemy [the Deuteronomists].(269) The historical writers working largely within the Deuteronomic tradition describe the content of blessing as the gift of watering-places,(270) the guarantee of successors on the throne,(271) and physical strength or great wisdom.(272) The Chronicler, whilst developing his own particular theological emphases, in his use of the root  $\text{ברך}$  does not diverge from the Deuteronomic stance of his *Vorlage* and reveals blessing to have a similar range of content.

Yet, although the content of blessing can only be described in the singular in a generalized way, in terms of that which contributes to the well-being of God's creation, in spite of its diversity of expression, *the content of blessing* in the Yahwist, the Deuteronomists and the historical writers of the Deuteronomic tradition, presents overall a remarkably coherent picture of what blessing is about. Possession of the land, many descendants and military might are all of a piece.

---

266. see pp 254-257

267. p 254 above

268. Genesis 12.1-3,7a et al, Numbers 22-24

269. cf Deuteronomy 7.3,15,16

270. Joshua 15.19/Judges 1.15

271. 2 Samuel 7.29; 1 Kings 2.45

272. Judges 13; 1 Kings 10.9

Overrunning Canaan is linked with the size of the tribes, which in turn is a factor in making them powerful in waging war [the Yahwist]. The health of the people reflects the fact that they are well-provided with food and again contributes to them being numerous and hence powerful [the Deuteronomists]. The many facets of the content of blessing are experienced as God's gifts to his people. It is the feeling that blessing is God's gift which is the key-note to understanding blessing in these writers, even though the Deuteronomists express the conditional nature of blessing in much sharper terms than the Yahwist.

With regard to the content of blessing, the situation with the Priestly writers is not so very different from the Yahwist and the Deuteronomists. It is the *product* of that fertility which is built into all living things. It is large crops, great herds of cattle, innumerable children and, as such, constitutes the prosperity and well-being of the people. However, whereas in the Yahwist, the Deuteronomist and their followers, blessing is conceived of as God's gift consequent upon human obedience to God's commands, in the Priestly writings blessing is a gift of God implanted within living things which enables them to reproduce their own kind, to grow and multiply. It is a potential which has to be made actual. It is this latter fact which differentiates blessing in the Priestly writers most clearly from blessing in the other strands. As with them it is a way of describing how God relates to his world but it gives a different account from the Yahwist and the Deuteronomist of how that relationship works.

In all the strands blessing reveals above all that God is the Creator. He made everything that is. All the writers of the Hebrew scriptures are clear about this. However, the Creator who is greater than his creation, who is beyond everything that he has made, is not someone

---



who has left his creatures to their own devices. The concept of blessing always refers to what God does and as such shows him to be continuously involved with what he has made. He relates to his world in a living way. Yahweh is a present God who lives with his creation to enrich and enhance its life. Blessing is one way of describing the activity of an immanent God who encourages his creation towards the fulfilment of his purposes.

Yahweh is also the God who provides for his people's needs. The Israelites knew that they were dependent on their God for the maintenance of the very fabric of their day to day existence. He taught them in the desert to trust him for the daily provision of their food. An analysis of the various writers of the Old Testament demonstrates that Yahweh, for all of them, is the one who supplies their needs. He makes provision for all and therefore expresses a special concern for the poor who at first sight do not have a share in his bounty. Special arrangements are made for them in the Law. The widow, the orphan and the landless levite are catered for in the dispositions Yahweh makes for all his people. That lavish provision includes also the requisite offering for his worship. In the cult, in making sacrifice, in bringing the tithe, what human beings offer to God has first been provided by him.

In relation to human awareness of God's presence in blessing, for the Priestly writers, Yahweh works in and with the processes of nature because blessing is an endowment of all living things. After the Flood he reaffirms his intention that all should prosper in spite of human

---

disobedience and sinfulness.(273) For the Yahwist and the Deuteronomist blessing is the fulfilment of God's promises which results from human obedience to God's commands. The problem of theodicy which asks why the wicked should prosper is particularly acute following the Yahwist/Deuteronomist line. Why should God give good gifts to those who do not walk in his ways? The wealth of those who are not true to God's commandments is, however, marginally less of a problem when blessing is understood, with the Priests, as something built-in to the natural processes in relation to all living creatures. It is the offer of covenant which makes the difference in this context.

The covenant with Abraham is to be continued through Isaac, not through Ishmael. Both are blessed. Both are to be fruitful. No judgement is made concerning the worthiness of either to be blessed. They are both to be great nations but only Isaac is to be heir to the promises made to Abraham. So, apart from their moral worthiness, against the back-cloth of the blessing of all creation the wicked may well prosper, although their appreciation of their wealth remains defective if it is received simply as the fruit of their own work and not recognized as a gift and expression of God's will that all his creatures should prosper and if it does not spring out of an awareness of the covenant relationship between God and his people.

One further statement concerning the nature of God on which all the strands of the Old Testament are agreed is that he is the God of Israel, that is to say, he has chosen this particular people for a special relationship and a special task. This is not an arbitrary act of

---

273. see Genesis 9.1,7 pp 116-117

favouritism. God selected them for a purpose. He has chosen them to be the vehicle for making his intentions and purposes for creation known to the rest of the created world. In the Yahwist and Deuteronomist tradition God chose Abraham and made promises to him about how he and his descendants would be blessed. They would prosper and flourish to such an extent that all nations would want to be as fortunate as the people of Israel. God made a covenant with them for the sake of all people. The Yahwist takes Abraham as his starting-point in expounding his dominant theme of blessing.

The Priests begin their writing on the large map of creation which has the stamp of blessing right across it. They begin their work from a universal perspective in which the blessing of human beings includes dominion over the rest of the created order. Made in God's image, humankind is vicegerent over the rest of God's handiwork. Then the scene shifts to the blessing experienced by Israel in a covenant relationship with their God, narrowing in focus until in the end fixed on the theocratic community of the priesthood of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. That community in the Priestly perspective is to illustrate what it means to be blessed, to be fruitful and multiply, and to have dominion over the rest of the created order. It is the task of this community to act on God's behalf and mediate blessing in the name of Yahweh to all those who turn to him in worship.



## Part IV

### Chapter 10

#### Theological Pointers

This study began in a specific life-situation. It has demonstrated that blessing is a many-layered concept with rich tones which need to be rescued from trivialization. It is a celebration of the presence of God in and with his world which in essence includes all people. There is no "finished" doctrine of blessing in the Hebrew Scriptures. The development of the idea of blessing continues along various lines. There are, however, still today those who have an almost magical concept of blessing. There are still those who have a crude understanding of blessing as God's reward *tout court* for right conduct. In terms of the Methodist report cited at the beginning of this work, there remains an immense educational task if the practice of blessing is to be redeemed from superstition.

In his account of the blessing of Jacob by his father Isaac, Claus Westermann writes that "the blessing is the oldest sacrament".<sup>(1)</sup> Throughout this work it has been established that blessing is a way of expressing the fact that God is present with everybody and that his will and purposes for everybody are good and positive and life-enhancing. Blessing might well be described as sacramental in character. Helen Oppenheimer, however, writes: "Whatever we think about the pastoral advantages or disadvantages of 'indiscriminate

---

1. WESTERMANN Genesis II 440

baptism', undiscriminating blessing is hardly an improvement."<sup>(2)</sup> Whatever she means exactly by 'indiscriminate' baptism, blessing in the Priests' account of creation is precisely "undiscriminating". It is available to all, however tentative their faith in God, including in our secular society those whose belief is a mere residual trace. It would make no sense for someone who categorically *refuses* belief in God to offer himself or herself for blessing, i.e. ask God to make actual that potential which lies within them. It might nevertheless be entirely appropriate for a person of faith to say words of blessing to another as an expression of the fact that God is with him or with her even though God's offer of relationship is not reciprocated. It is a declaration of God's purpose for his children. They need to hear it in order that they may know that God is favourably disposed towards all and that nobody is excluded in God's intention. Blessing is a sign of inclusion and the offer of a relationship. On God's part that is always true. It should be true when one person blesses another. For anyone to bless somebody else in the name of God and not seek a relationship would be yet another way of taking God's name in vain.

Blessing expresses the catholicity of faith in truly sacramental fashion. It is a rite which belongs to the whole of the christian communion. It belongs to all Christians across the face of the earth as well as linking the Church today with the community of faith which descends from faithful Abraham. The final blessing at the end of an act of worship joins the worshippers with their brothers and sisters around the world and with all those down the ages who have known God's blessing and who have honoured his Name. On ecumenical occasions when it is not possible in the present divided state of the

Church to share bread and wine, with consultation it should be possible to offer blessing to fellow Christians in another Church as a sign of recognition and inclusion.

However, Christians are related not only to other Christians in blessing. They are also linked with all those who have inherited the promises made to Abraham. So, study of the concept of blessing together with Jews and with Muslims might also provide occasions of ecumenical convergence which other subjects loaded with the weight of controversy no longer possess. Blessing is a common part of the practice of each of these great biblical faiths. In each case it has its roots in the blessing promises made to Abraham by whom "all the families of the earth shall bless themselves" [the Yahwist] and in the universal blessing of creation "in the beginning" [the Priestly writers]. The concept of blessing is an area where something of our common heritage may be discovered and explored together.

Ecumenism is, however, not just about the unity of the Church nor even just about inter-faith dialogue. It relates to the *οἰκουμένη*, the whole inhabited earth. The concept of blessing described in the Priestly writings relates to the whole of creation and is ecumenically important because of the ongoing need for dialogue with all those who are concerned about the future of planet earth, whatever their motivation. Much has been said and written in recent years about the abuse of the earth. The blame for this abuse has frequently been laid at the door of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. It has been said, with some justification, that the dominion over creation given by God to the human race has been a direct cause of the rape of the earth. A study of blessing demonstrates that dominion does not have to be exploitation. Indeed it is best understood in terms of co-operation, for

---



God has made a world which works best when each part knows its interrelatedness and its interdependence. The theology of blessing expresses God's desire that we should collaborate with him, with other human beings and with the rest of the created world to achieve his purposes for the whole.

One of the jargon words which modern theology has "discovered" is the word "panentheism". God is in everything and everything is in God. It is offered as the antidote to deism. God did not just create the world and then leave it to its own devices. God is involved in his world. It is offered as the corrective to pantheism. God and nature are not co-terminous. God is not nature personified. These are proper insights for Christians to bring to bear on the modern ecological debate. They do not, however, really need to look further than the concept of blessing to express those selfsame truths. Panentheism is the blessing God immanently involved in his creation, both in the macro-issues and in the micro-detail, the same God who transcends everything that is.

Blessing has something to say about human relationships across the face of the earth and about the relationship of human beings to the earth itself. It relates to the whole *οἰκουμένη*. It is an ecumenical concept, offering the possibility of bringing together in dialogue large numbers of people who share a common heritage and who share a common concern for the well-being of the planet. Blessing, however, also relates to the *οἰκουμένη* in terms of the distribution of the material, physical products of the earth. Because blessing is about human solidarity, it has implications not merely for the domestic house-keeping of the family unit but also for the way in which one group relates to another within society and with how nations help each other in economic terms around the world.

other in economic terms around the world.

This study has alluded in many places to the "stiffness" of blessing. It has a material, physical nature which cannot be ignored. It does not take great efforts of imagination to translate the concern of the Hebrew scriptures for the care of the poor, the widow, the orphan and the landless levite, into global terms. When God blesses, he provides abundance and it belongs to the enjoyment of blessing to provide for those in need. The scale of today's needs would have been beyond the power of the Old Testament writers to conceive but the principles of justice and mercy which they enunciated, rooted in the Law, are directly applicable to the lavish provision which God has made for the maintenance of life throughout the entire world. It was said in relation to the "liberal man" of the Book of Proverbs that in a situation of famine it would be a terrible, cynical act to withhold grain in order to force prices higher, unmoved by human suffering.<sup>(3)</sup> An adequate theology of blessing ought to open the doors of today's even bigger barns to feed the hungry, for the enrichment of all. The pronouncement of blessing on the poor, the declaration of God's goodwill, is the offer of a relationship. It is also the offer of practical, material aid. Anything less would not be the kind of blessing which the Hebrew writers describe. The test of the health of any society must be its attitude to and care for the poor.

Blessing is about human relationships in terms of the whole human race. It is, however, also about human relationships one to one, and specifically in the most intimate situation one to one where our sexuality is given expression in sexual intercourse. Procreation is a

---

3. see pp 177-178

course, be abused. People can and do exploit each other. The concept of blessing whereby God implants within us the power to reproduce our own kind is none the less a statement of God's intention that our sexuality be good and beautiful, life-producing and life-enhancing.<sup>(4)</sup> The blessing of fertility and the command to go and multiply are God's chosen way of continuing human life on the earth. They are his way of giving a part of the continuing work of creation into our hands. Blessing is the handing on of life.

The same concept is at work in commissioning to office by the laying-on of hands. Johannes Behm writes insistently about the laying-on of hands as "Übertragung". Power and vitality flow from one to the other in a way analogous to the transmission of life itself from one generation to the next. In ordination, in healing, as in blessing, the laying-on of hands is the means of communicating power. Something of the life-force of the source is passed on to the recipient. Blessing includes the other person within the community of well-being and seeks his or her prosperity and happiness. Ordination includes within an Order. It gives authority and power to act in the name of the Order. Healing brings the other into living contact with wholeness. All of this is achieved through the laying-on of hands, the roots of which lie in the Hebrew scriptures.

Finally, if **צִדְקָה** is basically about how the various elements of the created world relate to each other and to God, then the **צִדִּיק** is one

---

4. IRENE NOWELL Concilium 178 1985 5



who maintains those relationships in accordance with God's will.(5) The result ought to be blessing. However, the biblical writers recognize that frequently the righteous suffer and that their suffering is undeserved. Furthermore, in this world of upside-down values, not only do the righteous suffer, the wicked seem to prosper.(6) Why? How can it be reconciled with God's righteousness and justice?

The Old Testament offers a number of ways of understanding why people suffer, some more satisfactory than others. All the writers of the Hebrew scriptures are clear that there is only one God. "Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD..."(7) Because he alone is the creator, ultimately he must be responsible for the way things are. He it is who gave them the possibility of what they have become. He is powerful and loves his people, why then does he not deal with evil and take away suffering? If he himself is not directly the cause of suffering, he must for some reason allow it.

The first and clearest thing that the Book of Job demonstrates is that the Satan is *given permission* to test Job. That is one attempt to find meaning in suffering. It is a *test of faith*. Then there are places where suffering is understood as God's punishment of sin; where he is thought of as disciplining his people;(8) where suffering is seen as the expiation of sin; where there is a limited and very qualified dualism

---

##### 5. FAHLGREN 108

"Treue halten heisst, *saddīk* sein." "Ein *saddīk* sein bedeutet also negativ, sich in keiner Weise gegen Gemeinschaftsglieder vergehen. Deshalb erhält das Wort in der Rechtssprache die Bedeutung »unschuldig«..."

6. Psalm 73.12-14

7. Deuteronomy 6.4

8. Psalm 6.1

[as in the case of the serpent in Genesis or the Satan in Job] according to which responsibility for evil and suffering is assigned to one of God's creatures. There is even an agnostic view which leaves all explanation of suffering to the inscrutable purposes of God.(9) It is difficult to know whether Job's statement in Job 1.21 ["The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD"] is a counsel of resignation or an expression of restraint. Whichever be the case, it must be acknowledged that the writers of the books of the Old Testament are neither resigned nor restrained. The Psalms resound with loud and vigorous protest against unjust suffering and against the prosperity of the wicked. Protest is one of the clearest Old Testament responses to suffering. There is no fatalistic acceptance of it. They do not merely accept the way things are; nor does God just accept the status quo. He himself enters into human suffering.

"Then the LORD said, "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey..."(10) The God who is with them to save them from their oppressors is also the God who is with them to prosper them in the land of Canaan. The key to a unitary understanding of the many ways in which God relates to his people is an adequate doctrine of his presence.

Blessing is about God's continuing presence with his people. It is about his presence with them everywhere. The living God is active in the

---

9. Psalm 92.5-6

10. Exodus 3.7-8

world he has made.(11) Because he lives with human beings in  $\text{לִבָּם}$  he shares every dimension of their lives. He cannot look on them in those situations and at those times when they suffer without himself entering into their suffering. He is present with them even there. However, because Yahweh's presence is a blessing presence he seeks their well-being even in their pain, so that the sharing of suffering is discovered to be the beginning of its transformation. Although this line of thought is not fully formed in the Old Testament but has to await development in the New Testament, the Psalmist can write: "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want..."(12)

---

11. HESCHEL II 57

"God is not a point at the horizon of the mind, but is like the air that surrounds one and by which one lives. He is not a thing, but a happening. The psalmist may ask man to meditate on God's works; the prophets call upon man to consider God's inner acts. They not only sense God in history, but also history in God."

12. Psalm 23.1f





## Bibliography

- AGRELL, G.  
Work, Toil and Sustenance  
 Verbum Håkan Ohlssons Förlag, Lund 1976
- ALBERTZ, M.  
 "Segen und Gelübde"  
 ZdZ 6 1952 390
- ALBRIGHT, W.F.  
 "The Oracles of Balaam"  
 JBL 63 1944 207-233
- ALLEGRO, J.M.  
 "A Possible Mesopotamian Background to the Joseph  
 Blessing of Gen. xlix"  
 ZAW 64 1952 249-251
- ALLIS, O.T.  
 "The Blessing of Abraham"  
 PTR 25 1927 263-298
- ANDERSON, B.W. Ed.  
Creation in the Old Testament  
 [Issues in Religion & Theology 6]  
 SPCK, London 1984
- ASCENSIO, F.  
 "Las Bendiciones divinas en el A. Testamento"  
 Est Eccl 19 1945 401-422  
 "Trayectoria historico-teologica de la 'benediccion'  
 biblica de Yahweh en labios del hombre"  
 Greg 48 1967 253-283
- AUDET, J-P.  
 "Esquisse historique du genre littéraire de la  
 'bénédiction' juive et de l' 'eucharistie' chrétienne"  
 RB 65 1958 371-399
- AUSTIN, J.L.  
How to do things with Words  
 Clarendon Press, Oxford 1962
- BALTZER, K.  
The Covenant Formulary  
 ET D.E. Green, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1971
- BARR, J.  
The Semantics of Biblical Language  
 Oxford University Press, Oxford 1961
- BAUDOT, J.  
 "article: Bénédiction"  
 DACL 2 1910 670-684

- BAUER, W.  
Der Wortgottesdienst der ältesten Christen  
 JCB Mohr [Paul Siebeck], Tübingen 1930
- BEHM, J.  
 "article: εὐαθήκη"  
 TDNT II 124-134  
Die Handauflegung im Unchristentum  
 Deichert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Leipzig 1911  
 Reprinted: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft,  
 Darmstadt 1968
- BERGER, K.  
 "Apostelbrief und apostolische Rede/Zum Formular  
 frühchristlicher Briefe"  
 ZNW 65 1974 190-231
- BERTRAM, G.  
 "article: μακάριος, μακαρίζω, μακαρισμός"  
 TDNT IV 364-367
- BEYER, H.W.  
 "article: εὐλογέω"  
 TDNT II 754-765
- BICKERMAN, E.J.  
 "Bénédiction et Prière"  
 RB 69 1962 524-532
- BIEDER, W.  
Segnen und Bekennen  
 Basileia Verlag, Basel 1965
- BISHOP, E.F.F.  
 "Eulogetos"  
 Ignace Goldziher Memorial I  
 Budapest 1948 82-88
- BLANK, S.A.  
 "The Curse, Blasphemy, the Spell and the Oath"  
 HUCA 23 1950-51 73-95  
 "Some Observations concerning Biblical Prayer"  
 HUCA 32 1961 75-90
- BLYTHIN, I.  
 "The Patriarchs and the Promise"  
 SJT 21 1968 56-73
- BRICHTO, H.C.  
The Problem of 'Curse' in the Hebrew Bible  
 Society of Biblical Literature, Philadelphia 1963  
 [JBL Monograph Series 13]  
 Corrected Reprint 1968
- BRODDE, O.  
 "Segen und Fluch [IV Liturgisch]"  
 EKL III 1959 920



BRONGERS, H.A.

"Die Wendung beßem Jhwh im alten Testament"

ZAW 77 1965 1-20

BRUEGGEMANN, W.

"The Kerygma of the Priestly Writers"

ZAW 84 1972 397-413

BRUN, L.

Segen und Fluch im Urchristentum

Skrifter utgitt av det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi II

Historisk-Filosofisk Klasse I Bind, Oslo 1932

BUCK, C.H.

"The Collection for the Saints"

HTR 43 1950 1-29

BURGER, E.

"Magie und Glaube - Was ist ein gesegnetes Volk?"

DT 11/12 1938

CANAAN, T.

"The Curse in Palestinian Folklore"

JPOS 15 1935 240-279

CAZELLES, H.

"אֲשֶׁרִי 'ashrê"

TDOT I 445-448

CHAMPION, L.G.

Benedictions and Doxologies in the Epistles of Paul

City of Oxford, 1935

CHELHOD, J.

"La baraka chez les arabes [ou l'influence  
bienfaisante du sacré]"

[Annales du Musée Guimet]

Rev Hist Rel 148 1955 68-88

CLIFFORD, R.J.

"The Use of Hôy in the Prophets"

CBQ 28 1966 458-464

COHEN, M.

"Genou, Famille, Force, dans le domaine  
chamito-sémitique"

Mémorial H. Basset I Paris 1928 203-210

[Nouvelles Etudes nord-africains et orientales -

Publications de l'Institut des Hautes Etudes

Marocaines 17-18]

CONZELMANN, H.

"χάρις, χαρίξομαι, χαριτόω, ἀχαριστος

Section A 372-376; Section C,D,E,F 387-402

χαρισμα 402-406

εὐχαριστέω, εὐχαριστία, εὐχαριστος 407-415"

TDNT IX

- COPPENS, J.  
"La Bénédiction de Jacob"  
Supplements to VT 4 1957 97-115
- COUROYER, B.  
"BRK et les Formules Egyptiennes de Salutation"  
RB 85 1978 575-585
- CRENSHAW, J.L. Ed.  
Theodicy in the Old Testament  
[Issues in Religion and Theology 4]  
SPCK, London 1983
- CROSS, F.M. & FREEDMAN, D.M.  
"The Blessing of Moses"  
JBL 67 1948 191-210
- CULLMANN, O.  
"The Significance of the Qumran Texts for Research  
into the Beginnings of Christianity"  
JBL 74 1955 213-226
- DANBY, H.  
The Mishnah  
Oxford University Press, 1933
- DARRAGON, B.  
"article: Les Bénédictiones"  
A.G. Martimort - L'Eglise en Prière  
Desclée et cie, Tournai 1961
- DAUBE, D.  
Studies in Biblical Law  
Cambridge University Press 1947
- DAVIDSON, R.  
The Courage to Doubt  
SCM Press, London 1983
- DELLING, G.  
"Partizipiale Gottesprädikationen in den Briefen des  
NT"  
St Theol 17 1963 1-59
- DUMBRELL, W.J.  
Covenant and Creation  
Paternoster Press, Exeter 1984
- DÜRR, L.  
Die Wertung des göttlichen Wortes im alten  
Testament und im antiken Orient  
J.C. Hinrichs Verlag, Leipzig 1938  
[Mitteilungen der vorderasiatisch-ägyptischen  
Gesellschaft 42]
- ECHTERNACH, H.  
Segnende Kirche - eine exegetische Studie  
Verlag C. Ludwig Angelenk, Dresden 1941

EICHRODT, W.

Theology of the Old Testament

ET J.A. Baker, SCM Press, London 1961

EISENBEIS, W.

Die Würzel  $\text{DLW}$  im alten Testament

BZAW 113 1969

EISENHOFER, L.

Handbuch der katholischen Liturgik

Herder Verlag, Freiburg im Breisgau 1933

EISSFELDT, O.

"Non Dimittam Te, Nisi Benedixeris Mihi"

Mélanges Bibliques rédigés en l'honneur de André Robert

[Travaux de l'Institut Catholique de Paris 4]

Bloud et Gay, Paris 1957 77-81

"Sinaierzählung und Bileam-Sprüche"

HUCA 32 1961 179-190

ELBOGEN, I.

Der jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung

G. Fock, Leipzig 1913

Reprinted: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, Hildesheim 1962

ELLIGER, K.

"Der Jakobskampf am Jabbok, Gen.23.33ff als hermeneutisches Problem"

ZThK 48 1951 1-31

ELLIS, P.F.

The Yahwist, the Bible's First Theologian

Geoffrey Chapman, London 1969

EMERTON, J.A.

"The Origin of the Promises to the Patriarchs in the Older Sources of the Book of Genesis"

VT 32 1982 14-32

FAHLGREN, K-H.

S<sup>e</sup>daka, nahestehende und entgegengesetzte Begriffe im Alten Testament

Almquist & Wiksells Boktryckerei, Uppsala 1932

FENSHAM, F.C.

"Malediction and Benediction in the Ancient Near Eastern Vassal-treaties and the Old Testament"

ZAW 74 1962 1-9

"Salt as Curse in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East"

BA 25 1962 48-50

"Common Trends in Curse of the Near Eastern

Treaties and KUDURRU-Inscriptions compared with



- Maledictions of Amos and Isaiah"  
ZAW 75 1963 155-175
- FERNANDEZ, A.  
"In te benedicentur universae cognationes terrae"  
VD 11 1931 137-140  
"Benedicentur in semine tuo omnes gentes terrae"  
VD 11 1931 161-164
- FINKELSTEIN, L.  
"The Birkat Ha-Mazon"  
JQR NS 19 1928-29 211-262
- FISHBANE, M.  
"Form and Reformulation of the Biblical Priestly  
Blessing"  
JAOS 103 1983 115-121
- FOERSTER, W.  
"article: εἰρήνη"  
Section A 400-402; Sections C,D,E,F 407-420  
TDNT II
- FONESCA, L.G.  
"De Semoneh 'esreh' et octodecim Benedictionibus"  
VD 9 1929 248-255
- FRANZ, A.  
Die kirchlichen Benediktionen im Mittelalter  
Herdersche Verlag, Freiburg im Breisgau 1909
- FRETHEIM, T.E.  
The Suffering of God  
Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1984
- GAVIN, F.  
The Jewish Antecedents of the Christian Sacraments  
SPCK, London 1928
- GERLEMAN, G.  
"Das übervolle Mass - ein Versuch mit haesaed"  
VT 28 1978 151-164
- GERSTENBERGER, E.  
"The Woe-Oracles of the Prophets"  
JBL 81 1962 249-263
- GERSTENBERGER, E. & SCHRAGE, W.  
Suffering  
Abingdon, Nashville 1980
- GEVIRTZ, S.  
Curse Motifs in the Old Testament and in the  
Ancient Near East  
University of Chicago 1959  
"Article: Curse"  
IDB I 749-750

- "West-Semitic Curses and the Problem of the Origins of Hebrew Law"  
VT 11 1961 137-158  
"Adumbrations of Dan in Jacob's Blessing on Judah"  
ZAW 93 1981 21-37
- GILLET, D.  
"Shalom: content for a slogan"  
Themelios 1 1976 80-84
- GLUECK, N.  
Hesed in the Bible  
The Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati 1967
- GOLKA, F.W.  
"God who blesses"  
Theology 83 1980 83-91
- GOOD, E.M.  
"The 'Blessing' on Judah, Gen.49.8-12"  
JBL 82 1963 427-432
- GREENBERG, M.  
"The Hebrew Oath Particle HAY/HE"  
JBL 76 1957 34-39
- GREYER, O.  
Name und Wort Gottes im alten Testament  
BZAW 64 1934
- GROSS, M.  
The Relation of Blessing and Cursing in the Psalms to the Evolution of Hebrew Religion  
Private Edition, lithographed University of Chicago Library 1934
- GUILLET, J.  
Thèmes Bibliques  
Aubier, Paris 1954  
"La Langue spontanée de la bénédiction dans l'Ancien Testament"  
Rech Sc Rel 57 1969 163-204
- HÄNGGI, A.  
"Article: Segen III Liturgisch"  
LTK 592-596
- HARDY, D.W. & FORD, D.F.  
Jubilate - Theology in Praise  
Darton Longman & Todd, London 1984
- HARRELSON, W.J.  
"Article: Blessings and Cursings"  
IDB I 446-448
- HAUCK, F.  
"Article: μακάριος, μαχαρίζω, μαχαρισμός"  
Sections A,B,D 362-364; 367-369  
TDNT IV

- HEBERT, A.G. & SNAITH, N.H.  
 "A Study of the Words 'Curse' and 'Righteousness'"  
 Bib Tr 3 1952 111-116
- HEILER, F.  
Erscheinungsformen und Wesen der Religion  
 W. Kohlhammer Verlag, Stuttgart 1951
- HEINISCH, P.  
Personifikationen und Hypostasen im Alten Testament und im Alten Orient  
 Aschendorff, Münster in Westfalen 1921
- HEMPEL, J.  
Die israelitischen Anschauungen von Segen und Fluch  
 ZDMG NF IV 1925 20-110  
 Reprinted: Apoxysmata, BZAW 81 1961 30-113  
 "Article: Segen und Fluch I Religionsgeschichtlich II im Alten Testament"  
 RGG 2 V 1931 388-393  
 "Wort und Schicksal"  
Festschrift Alfred Bertholet zum 80 Geburtstag  
 JCB Mohr [Paul Siebeck], Tübingen 1950 222-232
- HENDERSON, M.E.  
The Significance of Blessing in Genesis 12-50  
 Dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Seminary 1977
- HERMANN, J.  
 "Zu Genesis 9.18-27"  
 ZAW 30 1910 127-131
- HESCHEL, A.J.  
The Prophets  
 Harper & Row, New York 1962
- HILLERS, D.R.  
Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets  
 Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome 1964
- HOFFMANN, L.A.  
 "Rabbinic Berakhah and Jewish Spirituality"  
 Concilium 1990/3 18-30
- HOFTIJZER, J.  
Die Verheissungen an die drei Erzväter  
 E.J. Brill, Leiden 1956
- HOLZMEISTER, U.  
 "Beatum est dare, non accipere"  
 VD 27 1949 98-101
- HORST, F.  
 "Segen und Segenshandlungen in der Bibel"  
 EvTh 7 1947/48 23-37  
 "Article: Segen und Fluch II im Alten Testament"  
 RGG V 1649-1651



- HORT, F.J.A. & MURRAY, J.O.F.  
 "ETXAPIETIA-ETXAPIETEIN"  
 JTS III 1902 594-598
- IMSCHOOT, P. van  
 "L'Esprit de Jahvé, source de vie dans l'ancien Testament"  
 RB 44 1935 481-501
- JACOB, E.  
Theology of the Old Testament  
 ET A.W. Heathcote & P.J. Pollock  
 Hodder & Stoughton, London 1964  
 "Le Dieu Souffrant, un thème théologique vétérotestamentaire"  
 ZAW 95 1983 1-8
- JANZEN, W.  
 "'Ašrê in the Old Testament"  
 HTR 52/2 1965 215-226  
Mourning Cry and Woe Oracle  
 BZAW 125 1972
- JENNI, E.  
Das hebraïsche Pi'el  
 EVZ-Verlag, Zürich 1968
- JOÜON, P.  
 "Reconnaissance et Remercîment en Hébreu Biblique"  
 Bib 4 1923 381-385
- JUNKER, H.  
 "Segen als heilsgeschichtliches Motivwort im alten Testament"  
 BETHL 12-13 1959 548-558
- KÄSER, W.  
 "Beobachtungen zum alttestamentlichen Makarismus"  
 ZAW 82 1970 225-250
- KELLENBERGER, E.  
häsäd wä'āmāt als Ausdruck einer Glaubenserfahrung  
 Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments 69  
 Theologischer Verlag, Zürich 1982
- KELLER, C.A. & WEHMEIER, G.  
 "Article: 772"  
 THAT I 353-376
- KILPATRICK, G.D.  
The Eucharist in the Bible and Liturgy  
 Cambridge University Press, 1983
- KITTEL, G.  
 "Article: Segen und Fluch"  
 RPTHK 18 148-154

- KLESSMANN, E.  
 "Was heißt Segnen nach der Heiligen Schrift?"  
 MPTh 48 1959 26-39
- KNIGHT, H.  
The Hebrew Prophetic Consciousness  
 Lutterworth, London 1947
- KOCH, K.  
 "Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?"  
 ZThK 52 1955 1-42
- KOHLER, K.  
 "Article: Benedictions"  
 JE 3 8-12
- KÖHLER, L.H.  
Theology of the Old Testament  
 Lutterworth Press, London 1957
- KÖSTER, H.  
 "Article: Segen und Fluch III im Neuen Testament"  
 RGG V 1651-1652
- KUTSCH, E.  
 "Gesetz und Gnade - Probleme des alttestamentlichen Bundesbegriffes"  
 ZAW 79 1967 18-35
- LANDSBERGER, B.  
 "Das 'gute' Wort"  
 Mitteilungen der altorientalischen Gesellschaft 4  
 Leipzig 1929 294-321  
 [Bruno Meissner zum 60 Geburtstag]
- LANG, B. Ed.  
Anthropological Approaches to the Old Testament  
 [Issues in Religion & Theology 8]  
 SPCK, London 1985
- LATHAM, J.E.  
The Religious Symbolism of Salt  
 Beauchesne, Paris 1982  
 [Théologie Historique 64]
- LAUTERBACH, J.Z.  
 "The Belief in the Power of the Word"  
 HUCA 14 1939 287-302
- LEFEBVRE, G.  
 "Article: XXI Les Sacramentaux"  
 Liturgia - Encyclopédie populaire des connaissances liturgiques  
 Librairie Bloud et Gay, Paris 1931
- LEFEVRE, A.  
 "Article: Malédiction et Bénédiction"  
 DBS Supplément V 746-751

- LEWY, I.  
 "The Puzzle of Dt.XXVII: Blessings announced, but Curses noted"  
 VT 12 1962 207-211
- LIEBREICH, L.  
 "The Songs of Ascent and the Priestly Blessing"  
 JBL 74 1955 33-36
- LIEU, J.M.  
 "'Grace to You and Peace': The Apostolic Greeting"  
 BJRL 68 1985 161-178
- LINK, H-G.  
 "Article: Segen"  
 TBNT II/2
- LIPINSKI, E.  
 "Macarismes et Psaumes de Congratulation"  
 RB 75 1968 321-367
- LOFTHOUSE, W.F.  
 "hen and hesed in the Old Testament"  
 ZAW 51 1933 29-35
- LORETZ, O.  
 "בְּרִית - 'Band-Bund'"  
 VT 26 1966 239-241
- LUCK, U.  
 "Article: Segen und Fluch im NT"  
 EKL III 919-920
- MANZER, A.  
 "Article: Segen"  
 LTK 423-427
- MATTSON, D.L.  
The Blessing Themes in the Abraham Story  
 Ph.D Thesis, University of Michigan 1983
- MEIN, P.S.  
The Biblical Doctrine of Blessing  
 Unpublished M.A. Thesis,  
 University of Nottingham, 1958
- MILLER, P.D.  
 "The Blessing of God. An Interpretation of Numbers 6.22-27"  
 Interpretation 29 1975 240-251
- MITCHELL, C.W.  
The Meaning of BRK "To Bless" in the Old Testament  
 Scholars Press, Atlanta 1987
- MORENZ, S.  
 "Article: Segen und Fluch I Religionsgechichtlich"  
 RGG V 1648-1649



MORETUS, H.

"Les Bénédiction des patriarches dans la  
littérature du IV<sup>e</sup> au VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle"  
BLE 1909 398-411; 1910 28-40; 83-100

MOWINCKEL, S.A.

Segen und Fluch in Israels Kult und Psalmendichtung  
Psalmstudien V, Jacob Dybwad, Kristiana 1924  
The Psalms in Israel's Worship  
Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1962  
"Der Ursprung der Bileamsage"  
ZAW 48 1930 233-271

MOWVLEY, H.

"The Concept and Content of 'Blessing' in the Old  
Testament"  
Bib Tr 16 1965 74-80

MUILENBURG, J.

"Abraham and the Nations"  
Interpretation 19 1965 387-398

MULLER, H-P.

"Segen im Alten Testament"  
ZThK 87 1990 1-32

MÜLLER W.W.

"Altsüdarabische Beiträge zum Hebräischen Lexikon"  
ZAW 75 1963 304-316

MURTONEN, A.

"The Use and Meaning of the Words l<sup>e</sup>barek and  
berakah in the Old Testament"  
VT 9 1959 158-177

McCARTHY, D.J.

Old Testament Covenant - A Survey of Current  
Opinions  
Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1972

McKANE, W.

Prophets and Wise Men  
SCM Press, London 1965

McKENZIE, J.L.

"Jacob at Peniel: Gn.32,24-32"  
CBQ 25 1963 71-76

NAUCK, W.

"Freude im Leiden: Zum Problem einer urchristlichen  
Verfolgungstradition"  
ZNW 46 1955 68-80

NICHOLSKY, N.

Spuren magischer Formeln in den Psalmen  
BZAW 46 1927

NICKLE, K.

The Collection

[Studies in Biblical Theology 48]

Alec R. Allenson, Inc., Naperville, Illinois 1966

OPPENHEIMER, H.

"Blessing" in

The Weight of Glory

Ed. D.W. Hardy & P.H. Sedgwick

T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1991

PEDERSEN, J.

Der Eid bei den Semiten

Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen  
Orient, zwanglose Beihefte 3

Verlag Karl J. Trübner, Strassburg 1920

Israel, its Life and Culture

OUP, London 1926

PLASSMANN, T.

The Signification of B<sup>e</sup>rākā

Imprimerie Nationale, Paris 1913

COLLINS, M. & POWER, D. Eds.

Blessing and Power

Concilium 178

T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1985

PREUSS, H.

"...ich will mit dir sein!"

ZAW 80 1968 139-173

QUELL, G.

"Article: εὐχαρίστησις"

TDNT II 106-124

QUINCEY, J.H.

"Greek Expressions of Thanks"

JHS 1966 133-158

RAD, G. von

"Article: εὐχήνη"

TDNT II 402-406

Old Testament Theology

Oliver & Boyd, London 1962

REED, W.L.

"Some Implications of ḥēn for Old Testament Religion"

JBL 73 1954 36-41

RENAUD, B.

"De la bénédiction du roi à la  
bénédiction de Dieu [Ps 72]"

Bib 70 1989 304-326

RENGSTORF, K-H.

"Geben ist seliger denn nehmen"  
Die Leibhaftigkeit des Wortes  
 [Festgabe für Adolf Köberle]  
 Furche-Verlag, Hamburg 1958

REVENTLOW, H. Graf

Problems of Old Testament Theology in the Twentieth Century  
 SCM Press, London 1985

ROBERTS, R.

"The Beatitude of Giving and Receiving"  
 Exp T 48 1936-37 438-441

ROBINSON, J.M.

"Heilsgeschichte und Lichtungsgeschichte"  
 EvTh 22 1962 113-141  
Die Hoda jot-Formel in Gebet und Hymnus  
des Frühchristentums  
 BZNW 30 1964 194-235  
 [Apophoreta - Festschrift Ernst Haenchen]  
 Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, Berlin

ROBINSON, H.W.

Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament  
 Clarendon Press, Oxford 1946  
 "The Psychology and Metaphysic of 'Thus saith Yahweh'"  
 ZAW 41 1923 1-15

SCHARBERT, J.

"Fluchen und Segnen im Alten Testament"  
 Bib 39 1958 1-26  
Solidarität in Segen und Fluch im Alten Testament  
und in seiner Umwelt  
 I Väterfluch und Vätersegen [BBB 14]  
 Peter Hanstein Verlag, Bonn 1958  
 "Article: Segen II Biblisch"  
 LTK 590-592  
 "Die Geschichte der baruk-Formel"  
 BZ NF 1973 1-28

SCHENK, W.

Der Segen im Neuen Testament  
 [Theologische Arbeiten Band XXV]  
 Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, Berlin 1967

SCHERMANN, T.

"Εὐχαριστία und εὐχαριστεῖν in ihrem  
 Bedeutungswandel bis 200 n. Chr."  
 Philologus NF 23 1910  
 "Das 'Brotbrechen' im Urchristentum"  
 BZ 8 1910 35-52; 162-183



SCHMIDT, H.

Das Gebet der Angeklagten im Alten Testament  
BZAW 49 1928  
"Grüsse und Glückwünsche im Psalter"  
TSK 103 1931 141-150

SCHOTTROFF, W.

Der altisraelitische Fluchspruch  
[Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und  
Neuen Testament 30]  
Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1969

SCHREINER, J.

"Segen für die Völker in der Verheißung an die Väter"  
BZ NF 6 1962 1-31

SCHUBERT, P.

Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings  
BZNW 20 1939 1-185

SEEBASS, H.

Der Erzvater Israel und die Einführung der  
Jahweverehrung in Kanaan  
BZAW 98 1966

SELLIN, E.

"Zu dem Judasspruch im Jakobsegen Gen, 49.8-12 und  
im Mosesegen Deut. 33.9"  
ZAW 60 1944 57-67

SEYBOLD, K.

Der aaronitische Segen  
Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1977

SIMONS, T.G.

Blessings: A Reappraisal  
Resource Publications, Saratoga 1981  
Blessings for God's People  
Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana 1983

SMITH, S.

"Note on Blessings"  
PEQ 81 1949 57

SNAITH, N.H.

The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament  
Epworth Press, London 1944

SPEISER, E.A.

"I know not the day of my death"  
JBL 74 1955 252-256

STAUFFER, E.

"Zur sakramentalen Bedeutung des kirchlichen Segens"  
Viva Vox Evangelii  
[Festschrift für Landesbischof D. Hans Meiser]  
Munich 1951 324-334

- STEMPVOORT, P.A. van  
 "The Interpretation of the Ascension in Luke and Act"  
 NTS 5 1958-59 30-42
- STOEBE, H-J.  
 "Die Bedeutung des Wortes Häsäd im Alten Testament"  
 VT 2 1952 245-254
- STUIBER, A.  
 "Article: Eulogia"  
 RACH VI 900-928
- STYS, S.  
 "Benedixit diei septimo et sanctificavit illum"  
 VD 9 1929 263-268; 333-339
- SZERUDA, J.  
Das Wort Jahwes - eine Untersuchung zur israelitischen-jüdischen Religionsgeschichte  
 Druk von Z. Manitius, Lodz 1921
- TALLEY, T-J.  
 "De la 'Berakah' à l'Eucharistie une question à examiner"  
 La Maison-Dieu 125 1976 11-39
- THISELTON, A.C.  
 "The Supposed Power of Words in the Biblical Writings"  
 JTS NS 25 283-299
- THURUTHUMALY, J.  
Blessing in St. Paul  
 Pontifical Institute of Theology and Philosophy  
 Alwaye, India 1981
- TOLL, C.  
 "Ausdrücke für «Kraft» im Alten Testament mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Wurzel BRK"  
 ZAW 94 1982 111-123
- TOURNAY, R.  
 "Le Psaume et les Bénédictiones de Moïse [Deutéronome xxxiii]"  
 RB 65 1958 181-213
- TOWNER, W.S.  
 "'Blessed be YHWH' and 'Blessed art Thou, YHWH' - The Modulation of a Biblical Formula"  
 CBQ 30 1968 386-399
- UNNIK, W.C. van  
 "Dominus Vobiscum: The Background of a Liturgical Formula"  
New Testament Essays - Studies in memory of T.W. Manson  
 Ed. A.J.B. Higgins, Manchester University Press 1959

- VAWTER, B.  
 "The Canaanite Background of Genesis 49"  
 CBQ 17 1955 1-18
- VERENO, M.  
 "Article: Segen I Religionsgeschichtlich"  
 LTK 589-590
- VETTER, D.  
Jahwes Mit-Sein als Ausdruck des Segens  
 Calwer Verlag, Stuttgart 1971  
Sehenspruch und Segensschilderung  
 Calwer Verlag, Stuttgart 1974
- VIRGO, L.  
 "First Aid in Pastoral Care I The Biblical Basis"  
 Exp T 95 1984 196-200
- WANKE, G.  
 "Mitteilungen אֱלֹהִים und הָאֱלֹהִים"  
 ZAW 78 1966 216-218
- WEHMEIER, G.  
Der Segen im Alten Testament  
 Friedrich Reinhardt Kommissionsverlag, Basel 1970
- WEINFELD, M.  
 "Article: בְּרִית b<sup>e</sup>rîth"  
 TDOT II 253-279
- WESTERMANN, C.  
 "Article: Segen und Fluch  
 I Religionsgeschichtlich II AT"  
 EKL III 916-919  
 "Die Frage nach dem Segen"  
 ZdZ 11 1957 244-253  
 "Der Segen"  
 ZdZ 17 1963 63-64  
Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech  
 Lutterworth, London 1967  
Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church  
 Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1978  
What does the Old Testament say about God?  
 Ed. F.W. Golka, SPCK, London 1979  
The Promise to the Fathers  
 Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1980  
Praise and Lament in the Psalms  
 T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1981
- WHARTON, J.A.  
 "The Command to bless"  
 Interpretation 13 1959 37-48
- WICKS, H.J.  
 "St. Paul's Teaching as to the Rewards of Liberality"  
 Exp T 29 1917-18 424-425



WOLFF, H.W.

"Das Kerygma des Yahwisten"

EvTh 24 1964 73-98

"Das Kerygma des deuteronomistischen  
Geschichtswerk"

ZAW 73 1961 171-186

"Zur Thematik der elohistischen Fragmente im  
Pentateuch"

EvTh 29 1969 59-72

WONNEBERGER, R.

"Der Segen als liturgischer Sprechakt"

[in OEHLER, K.[ed.] Zeichen und Realität

Akten des 3. Semiotischen Kolloquiums,  
Hamburg 1981, 3 vols]

Probleme der Semiotik 1, 1984 1069-1079

WOOD, H.G.

"Have Salt in Yourselves"

The Friend 92 1934 1-2

ZDESAR, J.

ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΑ und ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΑ im Neuen Testament

Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, Klagenfurt 1956

ZERWICK, M.

"Benedictus Deus..."

VD 22 1942 3-7

ZIMMERLI, W.

"Promise and Fulfilment"

Essays in Old Testament Interpretation

Ed. C. Westermann, SCM Press, London 1963

#### Biblical Commentaries

Genesis

BALDWIN, J.G.

The Message of Genesis 12-50

From Abraham to Joseph

Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester 1986

BRUEGGEMANN, W.

Genesis

John Knox Press, Atlanta 1982

COATES, G.W.

Genesis, with an Introduction to

Narrative Literature

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1983

DRIVER, S.R.

The Book of Genesis  
Methuen, London 1916

GUNKEL, H.

Die Urgeschichte und die Patriarchen  
Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1911

RAD, G. von

Genesis  
SCM Press, London 1961

RICHARDSON, A.

Genesis I-XI  
SCM Press, London 1953

SKINNER, J.

Genesis  
T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1910

SPEISER, E.A.

Genesis  
Doubleday, New York 1964

WESTERMANN, C.

Genesis 1-11; 21-36; 37-50  
SPCK, London 1984, 1985, 1986

Exodus

CHILDS, B.S.

Exodus  
SCM Press, London 1974

HYATT, J.P.

Exodus  
Marshall, Morgan & Scott, London 1980

McNEILE, A.H.

The Book of Exodus  
Methuen, London 1931

NOTH, M.

Exodus  
SCM Press, London 1962

TODD, W.

New Light on Exodus  
The Furnival Press, London 1980

Leviticus

HARRISON, R.K.

Leviticus  
Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester 1980

NOTH, M.

Leviticus

SCM Press, London 1965,1977

SNAITH, N.H.

Leviticus and Numbers

Nelson, London 1967

Numbers

BUDD, P.J.

Numbers

Word Books, Waco, Texas 1984

ELLIOTT BINNS, L.

The Book of Numbers

Methuen, London 1927

GRAY, G.B.

Numbers

T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1903

NOTH, M.

Numbers

SCM Press, London 1968

SNAITH, N.H.

Leviticus and Numbers

Nelson, London 1967

Deuteronomy

CRAIGIE, P.C.

The Book of Deuteronomy

Hodder & Stoughton, London 1976

CUNLIFFE-JONES, H.

Deuteronomy

SCM Press, London 1951

DRIVER, S.R.

Deuteronomy

T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1895

MAYES, A.D.H.

Deuteronomy

Marshall, Morgan & Scott, London 1979

von RAD, G.

Deuteronomy

SCM Press, London 1966

SMITH, G.A.

Deuteronomy

Cambridge University Press, 1950



## Joshua

BOLING, R.G. &amp; WRIGHT, G.E.

Joshua

Doubleday, New York 1980

GARSTANG, J.

Joshua Judges

Constable, London 1931

GRAY, J. (Ed.)

Joshua, Judges and Ruth

Nelson, London 1967

MILLER, J.M. &amp; TUCKER, G.M.

The Book of Joshua

Cambridge University Press 1974

SOGGIN, J.A.

Joshua

SCM Press, London 1970

## Judges

BOLING, R.G.

Judges

Doubleday, New York 1975

BURNEY, C.F.

The Book of Judges

Rivingtons, London 1920

GRAY, J.

Joshua, Judges and Ruth

Nelson, London 1967

MARTIN, J.D.

The Book of Judges

Cambridge University Press 1975

SOGGIN, J.A.

Judges

SCM Press, London 1981

## Ruth

CAMPBELL, E.F.

Ruth

Doubleday, New York 1975

GRAY, J.

Joshua, Judges and Ruth

Nelson, London 1967

# Samuel

ACKROYD, P.R.

The First Book of Samuel &  
The Second Book of Samuel  
Cambridge University Press 1971 & 1977

DRIVER, S.R.

Notes on the Hebrew Text and the  
Topography of the Books of Samuel  
The Clarendon Press, Oxford 1913

HERTZBERG, H.W.

I & II Samuel  
SCM Press, London 1964

MCCARTER, P.K.

I Samuel & II Samuel  
Doubleday, New York 1980 & 1984

McKANE, W.

I & II Samuel  
SCM Press, London 1963

SMITH, H.P.

The Book of Samuel  
T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1899

# Kings

BURNEY, C.F.

Notes on the Hebrew Text  
of the Book of Kings  
Oxford at the Clarendon Press 1903

GRAY, J.

I & II Kings  
SCM Press, London 1964

JONES, G.H.

1 & 2 Kings  
Marshall, Morgan & Scott, London 1984

KEIL, C.F.

The Books of the Kings  
Eerdmans, Grand Rapids

MONTGOMERY, J.A. & GEHMAN, H.S.

The Books of the Kings  
T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1951

## Chronicles

BARNES, W.E.

The Book of Chronicles  
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge  
1899

CURTIS, E.L. &amp; MADSEN, A.A.

The Book of Chronicles  
T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1910

COGGINS, R.J.

The First and Second Books of Chronicles  
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge  
1976

WILLIAMSON, H.G.M.

1 and 2 Chronicles  
Marshall, Morgan & Scott, London 1982

## Ezra and Nehemiah

BATTEN, L.W.

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah  
T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1913

BROCKINGTON, L.H.

Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther  
Nelson, London 1969

CLINES, D.J.

Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther  
Marshall, Morgan & Scott, London 1984

KIDNER, D.

Ezra and Nehemiah  
Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester 1979

MYERS, J.M.

Ezra : Nehemiah  
Doubleday, New York 1965

## Job

ANDERSEN, F.I.

Job  
Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester 1974

DHORME, E.

Job  
J.Gabalda et Cie, Paris 1926  
ET H.Knight  
Nelson, London 1967



DRIVER, S.R. & GRAY, G.B.

Job

T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1921

GIBSON, E.

The Book of Job

Methuen, London 1899

HABEL, N.C.

The Book of Job

SCM Press, London 1985

ROWLEY, H.H.

The Book of Job

Marshall, Morgan & Scott, London 1970

Psalms

ANDERSON, A.A.

Psalms [2 Volumes]

Marshall, Morgan & Scott, London 1972

DAHOOD, M.J.

Psalms [3 Volumes]

Doubleday, New York 1966-70

KIDNER, D.

Psalms [2 Volumes]

Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester 1975

RHODES, A.B.

Psalms

SCM Press, London 1960

RINGGREN, H.

The Faith of the Psalmists

SCM Press, London 1963

WEISER, A.

The Psalms

SCM Press, London 1962

WESTERMANN, C.

The Psalms, Structure, Content & Message

Augsburg Press, Minneapolis 1980

Proverbs

KIDNER, D.

The Proverbs

The Tyndale Press, London 1964

McKANE, W.

Proverbs

SCM Press, London 1970

OESTERLEY, W.O.E.

The Book of Proverbs  
Methuen, London 1929

TOY, C.H.

The Book of Proverbs  
T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1899

WHYBRAY, R.N.

The Book of Proverbs  
C.U.P., Cambridge 1972

Isaiah

BOX, G.H.

The Book of Isaiah  
Pitman, London 1908

CHEYNE, T.K.

The Prophecies of Isaiah  
Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., London 1886

HERBERT, A.S.

The Book of the Prophet Isaiah  
C.U.P., Cambridge 1973

KAISER, O.

Isaiah 13-39  
SCM Press, London 1974

KISSANE, E.J.

The Book of Isaiah  
Browne and Nolan, Dublin 1960

WESTERMANN, C.

Isaiah 40-66  
SCM Press, London 1969

Jeremiah

BRIGHT, J.

Jeremiah  
Doubleday, New York 1965

ELLIOTT BINNS, L.

The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah  
Methuen, London 1913

FREEDMAN, H.

Jeremiah  
Soncino Press, London 1949

HARRISON, R.K.

Jeremiah and Lamentations  
Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester 1973

HOLLADAY, W.L.

Jeremiah 1

Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1986

Ezekiel

COOKE, G.A.

The Book of Ezekiel

T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1936

EICHRODT, W.

Ezekiel

SCM Press, London 1970

FISCH, S.

Ezekiel

The Soncino Press, London 1950

GREENBERG, M.

Ezekiel, 1-20

Doubleday, New York 1983

ZIMMERLI, W.

Ezekiel 1 & 2

Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1979 & 1983

Joel

DRIVER, S.R.

The Books of Joel and Amos

The University Press, Cambridge 1901

MYERS, J.

Hosea to Jonah

SCM Press, London 1959

WOLFF, H.W.

Joel and Amos

Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1977

Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi

BALDWIN, J.G.

Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester 1972

BARNES, W.E.

Haggai and Zechariah

The University Press, Cambridge 1917

JONES, D.R.

Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi

SCM Press, London 1962



MITCHELL, H.G. et al.

Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Jonah  
T.& T. Clark, Edinburgh 1912

PETERSEN, D.L.

Haggai & Zechariah 1-8  
SCM Press, London 1984

### Abbreviations

BA	Biblical Archaeologist
BBB	Bonner Biblische Beiträge
BETHL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologiarum Lovaniensium
Bib	Biblica
BT	Bible Translator
BJRL	Bulletin of the John Rylands Library
BLE	Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique
BZ	Biblische Zeitschrift
BZAW	Beiheft Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beiheft Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
DACL	Dictionnaire d'Archéologie et de Liturgie
DBS	Dictionnaire de la Bible (ed. L. Pirot)
DT	Deutsche Theologie
EKL	Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon
EE	Estudios Eclesiásticos
ET	English Translation
EvQ	Evangelical Quarterly
EvTh	Evangelische Theologie
Exp T	Expository Times
Greg	Gregorianum
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual

IDB	Interpreters' Dictionary of the Bible
IKZ	Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift
ITQ	Irish Theological Quarterly
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JE	The Jewish Encyclopaedia
JHS	Journal of Hellenic Studies
JPOS	Journal of the Palestinian Oriental Society
JQR	Jewish Quarterly Review
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
Jud	Judaica
LTK	Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche
MD	Maison-Dieu
MPTh	Monatsheft zur Protestantischen Theologie
NF	Neue Folge
NRT	Nouvelle Revue Théologique
NS	New Series
NTS	New Testament Studies
PEQ	Palestine Exploration Society
PTR	Princeton Theological Review
RACh	Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum
RB	Revue Biblique
Rech Bib	Recherches Bibliques
RSR	Recherches de Science Religieuse
Rev Exp	Review and Expositor
RHR	Revue de l'Histoire des Religions
RGG	Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart



RPTkK	Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SJT	Scottish Journal of Theology
St Theol	Studia Theologica
TBNT	Theologisches Begriffslexikon zum Neuen Testament
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
THAT	Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament
ThB	Theologische Blätter
ThRund	Theologische Rundschau
TLZ	Theologische Literaturzeitung
TS	Theological Studies
TSK	Theologische Studien und Kritiken
TZ	Theologische Zeitschrift
VD	Verbum Domini
VT	Vetus Testamentum
WD	Wort und Dienst
ZAW	Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZdZ	Zeichen der Zeiten
ZDMG	Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft
ZKT	Zeitschrift für die Katholische Kirche
ZNW	Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZThK	Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche
ZWTh	Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie

## Index of Scriptural References

### Genesis

1	112,126,127
1.2,3,6,9	257
1.11	288
1.22	110,112,118,133,250,288
1.26	113
1.27-28	115
1.28	110,113,116,118,126,133,242,250,258,288
1-2.3	257
2.3	112,114,133
2.4f	257
2.7	204
5.1-2	114,115
5.2	118
9	117,237,265
9.1	116,118,133,251,298
9.1-17	133,251,298
9.4-6	116
9.6	116
9.7	116,118,251
9.26	37
9.27	52
11.27-32	52,54,237
11.30	54
12.1-3,7a	11,52-58,59,60,81,82,110,171,172,203,206 229,238,246,248,255,256,258,285,287,295
12.4	54
12.7	55,239
14	72,82,238,255,278
14.19f	38,72-74,272
15.5	62,255
15.18-21	118
16.7	257
17	117,118,120,206,241,251,255
17.11	235
17.13	235
17.17	119
17.20	119
18	83,228,257
18.18	58-59,63,229
19.1	257
21.22	260

## Genesis

22.15-18	59-60
22.17	62,75,81,255
24.1	60,269
24.11	12
24.26	153,280
24.27	74,236,271,280
24.31	61,255
24.35	60,271
24.48	74,280
24.52	280
24.60	74,82
25	60
26.24	62,63,83
26.29	63
26.34-35	119
27	75-78,238,243,271,273,283,287
27.1-45	119
27.21-22,26	282,283
27.7	75
27.29	78
27.30	44
27.46f	119
28	63,255
28.1	119
28.3	118,119
28.14	64,81,255
28.10-22	120
28.15	78,83
28.16	259
30	64
30.13	23
30.43	65,255
31.55	283
32	65-67,120,244
32.29	119
33	268
35.9-13,15	120
35.9	121,255
35.11	118,121,228
35.12	121
35.18	91
39.2	67,255,260
39.3	67,83,255,260
39.21	67,255
46.1-5	54



## Genesis

47.7	130,263
47.10	130,263
47.27	118
47.28	121
48	79,238,273,283
48.3-7	121
48.9	15
48.10	282
48.16	80
48.20	80
48.22	80
49	106,238
49.1-28	80
49.5-7	98
49.7	81
49.28	81
50.20	71

## Exodus

1.7	118
3.7-8	307
12.31,32	69
13.21-22	258
20.11	112
22.28	158
32	69,83
32.29	69,256
35.25	290
39.32	131
39.42-43	131

## Leviticus

9	131,134,252
9.6,23	258
9.22	98,124,132,282
10.1	132,269
17-26	122
19.9-10	256
24.10f	157
25	133,266
25.21	122,123
25.35f	102
27.30-33	99

Numbers

6	125-129,252,283
6.1-21	123
6.22	98
6.22-27	36,124,125,132
6.23	124
6.27	124
16.19,42	258
18.21-32	99
20.6	258
22-24	70-71,243-244,295
27.18,19f	282

Deuteronomy

1.1-3	241
1.8.	85,247
1.11	85
2.1-8	85
2.7	85,86,108,228,247,255,258
5.24	228
6.2	108
6.4	306
6.8	90
6.9	90
6.25	248
7	88
7.3	295
7.7	180
7.9	87,108
7.10	88
7.11	109
7.12	88
7.13	87,255
7.14	86
7.16	89,295
7.26	255
8.1-10	271
8.10	94,262
8.11	93-94,262
8.17	94
8.18	262
10.6-9	98,267
10.8	41
11	89

## Deuteronomy

11.13f	247
11.26-32	90
11.26	89
11.27	89
11.29	89,90
12	90
12.1-26.19	90
12.7	95
12.12	100
14.22f	248
14.24-25	100
14.26	100
14.27	100,231
14.29	100,101
15.1-12	101
15.4	101,248
15.5	102
15.6	102
15.11	102
16.1-8	96
16.10	97
16.16-17	97
18.1-8	98,267
23.20	102
24.10-13	103
24.17-22	103,104
24.13	104
26	94
26.1-4	248
26.11	257
26.12	94,266
26.13	256
26.15	290
27.1-26	90,91
28	90-92
28.2-6	290
28.47-48	290
29.19	41
30.19	92-93,247,264
31.20	256
33.1	105
33.16	106
33.19	106
33.21	106
33.24	106



Deuteronomy

34.9 282

Joshua

5.11-12 91  
8.30-35 91  
15.19 13,162,255,295  
17.1-18 135  
17.14 135  
22 161  
22.33 143

Judges

1.15 162,255,295  
5.2 154,255,262  
5.9 154,255,262  
6.12-13 160,259  
11.21 150  
13 135,255,295  
13.24-25 136  
14 136  
17 164

Ruth

2 256  
2.4 159  
2.19-20 162,263,269  
3.10 152,163,191,269  
4.14f 75,146,147,255

1 Samuel

2 162,255  
2.26 136  
2.28 162  
9.13 94,292  
13.10 44,130  
15.13 152,163,191,269  
17.45 268  
23.21 152,163,191  
25 161,263  
25.32 146,147

1 Samuel

25.33	152,191
25.39	146,147
26.25	152,163,191
30.26	162

2 Samuel

2.5	152,191
6	136
6.12-19	150,164,275
6.18	99,124,136
7	139
7.12	138,139
7.13	138
7.29	138,139,242,255,295
8.9-14	161,263,268,278
8.10	44
13.25	130,161
14.22	163,280
18.28	146,147,255
19.39	283
19.40	130,161
21.3	165

1 Kings

1.47	160,277
1.48	146
2	140
2.44-45	140-141,142,255,295
5	150,151,242
5.15	151,152
5.21	146
8	151-152
8.14	99,124,164,271,275
8.15	146
8.55	99,124,153,164,271,275
8.56	146
8.66	164,271
10	62
10.9	155,156,242,255,295
18.32	268
19.1-12	258
21.10	34,157
21.13	34,157

2 Kings

4.29	44,130,292,293
5.15	162
10.15	160
13.14-19	281
18.25f	150,165
22-23	241

1 Chronicles

4.9-10	141,142
16.2	164,275
16.36	146,150
17	139
17.27	138
18.10	44
23.12	99
23.13	41,99,164
26.5	255
29.10	143,146,152,153,192
29.14	143,291
29.16	291
29.20	143,154

2 Chronicles

2	150,242
2.11	146,150
6	151
6.4	146
6.13	12
9.8	155,242,255
20.25	159,255
20.26	158
30.27	164
31.8	144,256
31.10	144

Ezra

7.27	146,152
------	---------

Nehemiah

8.6	145,280
-----	---------



# Nehemiah

9.5	156
9.32	157
9.38	157
11.2	163
13.2	142

# Job

1	255
1.5	34,157,193,194
1.8	167
1.10	86,167
1.11	34,157,186,193
1.21	37,187
2.5	34,157,193
2.9	34,157,193,194
3.3-12	210
3.12	15
29.13	193,271
31.20	193
32.2	35
32.6	35
38	257,258
42.12	168,169

# Psalms

1	25
3	181-182
5	171
6.1	306
10.3	35,157,194-196,263
10.4	196
18.47	189,265
19.1	265
21	171-172
23.1f	308
24	178-179,266
26	184
28	182-183,267
28.6	189,261
29.11	192
31.21	189,261
32	25
34	184

## Psalms

37.22	179
41	25,189,261
45	170
49	197-198,273
62	198
63	184,280
65	25,289
66.8	186
66.20	186,189
67	126,167
67.2	192
68	186,189,191
69.30-31	264
72	189,191-192,261
73	249,306
84	13,199-200,255
89.24	236
89.52,53	189,192,265
92.5-6	307
95.6	12
96.1-13	186
96.13	187
98.7,7-9a	266
100.4	41,43,186
100.5	187,265
103.1-6	186,187,261
103.8,17	187
103.20-22	186
104	257
104.1,35	186
104.24	257
104.30	204
106.48	150,189,261
107.33-34,38	172,255
109	183
109.17	198
110.4	72
112	25,179,180
113	188
113.2	186-188
113.4	260
113.5-8	187,261
115.12-13	179
115.15	192,255
115.18	185

**Psalms**

118.26	192
119.12	152,153,189,191,192
119.137-144	265
121	128
124.6	189
127	25
128	180
128.5	192
129.8	160,198
132	180
133	169,186,265
134	186
134.3	192
135	145,186,189
136	265
139.1-18	257
144.1	189,265
145	185,186
147	173
147.11	264
149.4	264

**Proverbs**

3.13	24
3.18	23
3.19	257
3.33	173
5.18	192
6.6-11	176
10	255
10.2	175,196
10.6	174-175
10.7	43,174-176
10.15	176
10.22	174-175,196
11.11	176-177
11.25-26	177-178
14.21	24
20.21	198
22.9	179,271
24.25	179
27.14	196
28.20	43
29.18	24



Proverbs

30.11	199
31.28	23

Ecclesiastes

10.17	24
-------	----

Isaiah

5.8f	32
8.2	35
19.24-25	202-204,212,225,239
32.15	204
36.16	165
44.3	204,255
50.10	268
51.1-3	206,255
55.10-11	285
56.1	285
56.2	24
61	251
61.7-9	207,225
65.8	208
65.16	225
65.22	86
65.23	207,208,266
66.2	219
66.3	218

Jeremiah

3.4	209
3.15,19-25	209,239
4.1-4	209,225,239
6.14	234
8.11	234
17.7	209
20.14	211
31	255
31.23	222
31.25	223
32	35
36	35
43	35
45	35

Ezekiel

3.12-13	219-220,258
34.26-27	212-213,225,255,289
44.17-31	223,226

Hosea

6.6	236
12.7-9	220

Joel

2	225
2.11-14	214,215,221,230
2.19	215,255
2.23f	230

Micah

4.5	268
-----	-----

Habakkuk

2.6f	32
------	----

Zephaniah

3.12	268
------	-----

Haggai

1.4	216
1.8	215
2	226
2.5	215
2.17	86
2.19	218,255

Zechariah

8	216-218,225
8.13	212
11.5	220,226,255

Malachi

2.2	221,226
3.10	224,226,255

Wisdom

2.12	42
------	----

Matthew

25.33	91
-------	----

Luke

2.52	136
------	-----

Romans

1.7	42
-----	----

2 Corinthians

9.5	20
-----	----

Hebrews

7.7	130
-----	-----